



## **Taking Boys Seriously: A Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Male School-Life Experiences in Northern Ireland.**

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# TAKING BOYS SERIOUSLY - A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF ADOLESCENT MALE SCHOOL-LIFE EXPERIENCES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

by Dr Ken Harland and Sam McCready  
Centre for Young Men's Studies

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Education & Training

RESEARCH REPORT



**Faculty of Social Sciences**

School of Sociology and Applied Social Studies

# Taking Boys Seriously

A Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Male  
School-Life Experiences in Northern Ireland

2012

Dr Ken Harland | Sam McCready

**Centre for Young Men's Studies** | [www.cyms.ulster.ac.uk](http://www.cyms.ulster.ac.uk)

*In collaboration with YouthAction Northern Ireland*

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## FOREWORD

This report presents the findings of a five year longitudinal study (2006-2011) carried out by The Centre for Young Men's Studies at the University of Ulster and funded by the Department of Education and the Department of Justice.

The research was initiated in response to concerns about boys' educational underachievement and wider concerns about boys' health and well-being. The study annually tracked the same 378 adolescent boys aged 11-16 across nine post-primary schools in Northern Ireland. The longitudinal aspect of the study makes a significant contribution to how we can better understand and appreciate reasons why certain boys may struggle at school and therefore not achieve more successful educational outcomes.

Concerns about boys' underachievement have been highlighted since the mid 1990's and despite a suite of educational policies aimed at addressing underachievement, gaps between boys and girls remain consistent.

While some of the findings could also apply to girls, this study focuses firmly on boys' post-primary school and life experiences. The reader will sense the intentional consideration given throughout this report to the voice and experiences of the boys who participated in this study being at the centre of the research process. This was achieved through a creative and mixed methodology underpinned by an ethos of *'Taking Boys Seriously.'* The methodology also included working directly with boys in the classroom in partnership with experienced youth workers from YouthAction Northern Ireland. The reader will sense the energy, aspirations and at times the despair of these boys as they wrestled with a complex range of social, physical, psychological, emotional and transitional issues that impacted upon them at different stages of their development.

The report captures boys longing for a different type of relationship with adults as they mature. Despite this, boys felt they were often treated with increasing levels of distrust and suspicion by adults and found it difficult to remove negative labels that had been attached to them when they were younger. Although living in a society emerging from conflict boys spoke of feeling alienated from their communities and detached from decision making and peace-building processes. In addition the report reveals complex contradictions in how boys construct their masculine identities and accept certain acts of violence as a normal and everyday part of male youth culture.

While acknowledging that not all boys experience problems at school or in their community, the findings will be challenging to everyone who is concerned about boys' education and development. In particular it challenges those working with boys and young men to try and see beyond the bravado and stereotypical images that so often mask who boys really are.

This report makes recommendations which have important pedagogical implications for teaching, supporting and working with boys. Equally important it also offers many pragmatic ways to assist teachers in the classroom to help boys make better connections between school and their wider social, emotional and developmental needs.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Centre for Young Men's Studies is grateful for all those who contributed to this five year longitudinal study. We acknowledge the role and support of the nine schools and head teachers who coordinated the data collection each year. We also thank teachers for sharing their experiences, the case study school and in particular the 378 boys who allowed us to investigate their post-primary educational and life experiences.

The Centre would like to thank Trefor Lloyd, Boys Development Project, London, for his ongoing support during this longitudinal study and sharing of his knowledge and expertise. In 2009 Trefor spent six months on secondment as an Associate with the Centre and also contributed to the review of literature on boys' underachievement and violence and carried out the case study with an all-boys secondary school and the interviews with Head Teachers.

The Centre for Young Men's Studies was supported in this longitudinal study by YouthAction Northern Ireland – a youth organisation with expertise in working with marginalised boys and young men. The Centre would like to thank the Work with Young Men team at YouthAction Northern Ireland for their support throughout the five years of data collection. In particular we would like to thank the team for their professionalism and commitment during the delivery of youth work approaches to engaging boys in classrooms and collection of evidence from the classroom interventions. Delivery of the practice interventions was led by Team Leader, Michael McKenna (2006 – 2011); and staff members Peter Wray (2006 – 2011); Colm Walsh (2006 – 2007); Jonny Ashe (2008 – 2011); Barry McGinley (2008 – 2011); Bernard O'Shea (2010 – 2011) Gary Donnelly (2007 as a Young Male Volunteer and 2010 as a student on placement from Manchester Metropolitan University); Marc Cochrane (2007 as a Young Male Volunteer and 2008 as a Peer Educator), Luke McArdle (2009 as a Young Male Volunteer) and 'Gapper' Cormac Gould. Martin McMullan, Assistant Director with YouthAction NI provided support for the outcomes based interventions that took place in year four.

Thanks also go to Colm Walsh for his additional support in the collection and reporting of qualitative data from focus groups, Karen Beattie for her preliminary work for the Centre leading up to this study, Garry Prentice for statistical analysis, Gary Bradley for his support in developing the initial research framework, gathering and analysing data and Andrew Dixon for uploading data onto SPSS.

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Views expressed in this study are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of Education or the Department of Justice.



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Introduction**

The Centre for Young Men's Studies (CYMS) is located within the subject of Community Youth Work which resides within the School of Sociology and Applied Social Studies at the University of Ulster. The Centre aims to promote the voice, needs and interests of boys and young men through research that will inform practice, training and policy.

This report presents the findings of a five year research study conducted by the CYMS, and funded by the Department of Education and the Department of Justice (formerly the Northern Ireland Office). The study followed a cohort of 378 male pupils from nine post-primary schools, capturing their thoughts and experiences on an annual basis between School Years 8 and 12. The fieldwork commenced in the academic year 2006/7 and concluded in the academic year 2010/11.

### **Research Objectives**

The study was initiated in response to concerns about boys' educational underachievement and wider concerns about their health and well-being. The specific objectives of the research were to increase our understanding of:

- Factors that may contribute to male academic underachievement and finding practical ways to address this
- The value of education and how school can become a more positive learning experience
- Non-formal educational approaches
- Male transitions through post primary school; beyond post-primary school to higher education/work and factors that impact upon future employment aspirations; and transitions from boy to man
- How experiences of violence in a post-conflict society impact upon education and learning

These objectives were investigated through identifying and exploring factors that impacted upon the social, physical, psychological and emotional well-being of boys during their five year experience of post-primary education.

### **Methodology**

The study used a mixed method approach of quantitative and qualitative methods. Nine schools from across Northern Ireland participated in the study. The participating schools represented a mix of secondary and grammar, controlled and maintained, urban and rural, integrated, and All-boys and co-educational. A single cohort of 378 boys contributed to quantitative data collection over the five year period. Six questionnaires with different themes were used to collect the quantitative data. This happened each year of the study during one visit to each school in May or June:

- The About Me questionnaire – background and family information
- The KIDSCREEN Quality of Life questionnaire for adolescents (Rajmil et al, 2004)
- The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997) was used to assess emotional and behavioural issues
- Schools Questionnaire enquiring about school experiences, preferences, post-school aspirations.
- The Being a Man questionnaire exploring perceptions of 'masculinity and what it means to be a man.'

- The Violence Questionnaire seeking to understand how adolescent males conceptualise their perceptions of violence and their personal experiences of violence, being in trouble and bullying.

This quantitative data was supplemented by a number of qualitative approaches, including focus groups held every year within six of the nine participating schools, and regular classroom interventions with a sub-sample of pupils from two of the schools. These were delivered by experienced youth workers employed by Youth Action Northern Ireland.

Interviews were also held with six experienced Year 10 Head Teachers. Five of the teachers were from schools that were part of the longitudinal study and the other was from a school where other work by the Centre for Young Men's Studies staff was being delivered. An in-depth case study was also conducted in an all-boys secondary school that was not participating in the longitudinal study.

## KEY OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following grid presents a selection of key observations from the findings of this study and recommendations that we hope will be of value to schools, principals, teachers, policy makers, practitioners and adolescent boys. More detailed evidence and practical suggestions for the implementation of these recommendations are offered in Section Nine of this report.

Observation	Recommendation
<p>Teachers believed that <u>barriers to learning</u> were usually evident by, and within Year 8, and had been present in primary school.</p> <p>Some of the barriers to learning from boys' point of view included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Falling behind in school and course work and feeling they could not catch up</li> <li>• The lack of basic literacy and numeracy skills that are being carried forward from primary school and are not attended to early on in post-primary school</li> <li>• Getting bored easily and allowing this to show itself in disruptive behaviour in the classroom or simply turning off from the teacher</li> <li>• Poor teacher/pupil relationships</li> <li>• Boys from lower academic class streams perceiving they were not given the same opportunities to learn as those from higher academic classes</li> <li>• A lack of connection between subjects and boys' everyday lives</li> <li>• The pressures that start to build around Year 10 and carry on through to Year 12 and their need for dedicated support at these times</li> <li>• A lack of belief that success in school would actually lead to a job and fears of</li> </ul>	<p><b>1) Barriers to learning should be addressed as early as possible (eg primary school) and stronger links between primary and post-primary schools, parents and local communities should be developed to support transferring pupils and address issues.</b></p>

<p>debt if they go to university</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boys being unprepared for key transitional stages during adolescence</li> <li>• Boys feeling alienated within their communities and disconnected from the world of adults</li> <li>• Incidents of bullying</li> <li>• Violence (or threat of violence) being perceived as part of their everyday lives</li> </ul>	
<p>There is an absence of <u>gender specific approaches</u>, possibly due to lack of evidence of their effectiveness.</p>	<p><b>2) Further research into gender specific teaching should be carried out.</b></p> <p>Pedagogy and styles of learning should have a gender specific focus which attempts to better understand the wide range of issues and complexities associated with young male development.</p> <p>This includes recognition of the broad range of boys' abilities in the classroom and their different needs, and teachers being aware of what motivates boys.</p>
<p>Understanding and appreciating <u>age specific issues</u> associated with mental, emotional, physical, psychological and cognitive development are crucial for understanding adolescent male behaviour.</p> <p>The study found a higher number of boys reporting abnormal levels of conduct, hyperactivity, peer and social problems than UK averages.</p>	<p><b>3) Teacher training should support teachers to understand, recognise and respond to the changing needs of adolescent boys and young men.</b></p>
<p>The ways in which adolescent males construct their <u>understanding of masculinity and being a man</u> in early to mid-adolescence is complex, negotiated and renegotiated according to age, location and a range of wider social factors. This process has important implications for understanding adolescent male behaviour and attitudes towards education and learning.</p> <p>Understanding why certain boys do not seek emotional support is crucial. This complex area of male development is integral to working effectively with boys.</p>	<p><b>4) Boys should explore, reflect and develop a critical understanding of masculinity, and within this should be encouraged to challenge dominant and stereotypical notions of masculinity that can impact negatively upon themselves and others.</b></p> <p>For those working with boys in a school environment there is a need to better understand the internal pressures experienced by adolescent males in constructing their masculine identities and the link between this and their attitudes to school and learning.</p> <p>Boys would benefit from having a specific pedagogy during their development to assist their understanding of what it means to be a</p>

	man and to celebrate masculinity.
<p>Boys expressed concerns about a lack of preparedness for <u>key transitional stages during adolescence</u> such as transitions from primary to post-primary school, Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4, school to college/university/work, boy to man.</p> <p>Being emotionally prepared for the transition from primary to post-primary school is as important as being academically prepared.</p> <p>Boys' future aspirations are powerfully shaped by their approach to, and concern about, how well they will do in GCSE exams.</p> <p>Boys consistently spoke about the pressures and confusion of moving away from childhood behaviours to becoming, and being accepted as a young man.</p>	<p><b>5) Each school should offer boys support during key transitional stages such as primary to post-primary school, Key Stage 3, GCSE selection and careers advice.</b></p> <p>Relevant training in understanding adolescence, helping skills, solution focussed work and appreciation of the complexities for boys in the transition from boy to man would help with this process.</p>
<p>The nature of <u>teacher/pupil relationship</u> is a primary factor in boys' motivation and attitudes towards learning. While this relationship is important for all young people, it was the primary factor in determining the extent to which these boys engaged with lessons and it influenced their expectations as to how well they would do in subjects.</p> <p>Boys were looking for teachers who were interested in them, encouraged them, showed them respect and would help them sort out issues as quickly as possible.</p>	<p><b>6) The importance of teacher-pupil relationships should be at the heart of schools' ethos and approach to learning.</b></p> <p>Teacher training should consider the potential place and value of interpersonal skills training.</p>
<p>Youth Work is distinctively educational and involves constructive interventions with young people in non-formal settings. It is primarily concerned with personal and social education, and is characterised by the voluntary engagement of young people.</p> <p>Equality, inclusion and rights are the cornerstones of youth work. Its central purpose is to support and encourage young people to mature and reach their potential as valued individuals and responsible citizens and participate in shaping and influencing their own lives, communities and wider society.</p> <p><u>Youth work methodologies</u> were effective in engaging boys in the classroom. The approach was</p>	<p><b>7) Youth work methodologies should be utilised as appropriate. While youth work is aimed at all young people, its methodologies may be particularly useful for engaging young people who are disengaged / disengaging from mainstream education or facing particular barriers to learning.</b></p>

<p>relationship driven and developed as the boys matured across the five years.</p> <p>Youth work methodologies supported boys to recognise their learning and used approaches that enabled boys to see that they were building a skills base as well as a knowledge base.</p> <p>Teachers acknowledged the benefits of youth work methodologies in the classroom such as group work, story-telling, discussion, personal reflection, and connecting with boys' everyday life experiences.</p>	<p>Shared training in certain areas for teachers and youth workers would promote closer working relationships between formal and non-formal education.</p>
<p>The very <u>formal nature of the classroom</u> left a significant number of boys feeling bored, frustrated and impacted negatively on their concentration, particularly by having to remain sitting still and taking copious notes for large parts of the day.</p> <p>Boys identified large classes as reasons why they did not receive the additional academic support they believed they needed. The size and layout of classes also impacted negatively on a significant minority of boys' attitudes towards learning.</p> <p>School physical environment was strongly associated with levels of misbehaviour and negative attitudes towards learning.</p> <p>Boys reported having lower energy levels, particularly during the afternoon, which left them feeling tired or exhausted and lacking concentration.</p>	<p><b>8) School buildings and teaching plans should be designed with flexibility, movement and stimulation in mind. Ideally, young people should be involved in the design of the 'shared space' that teachers and pupils share in the day to day running of the school.</b></p> <p>Boys should be encouraged to play a full and active role in the life and work of the school whether through school councils or as part of a process that further increases their sense of belonging.</p>
<p>Boys in this study felt that most <u>subjects did not connect directly to the reality of their everyday lives outside of school.</u></p> <p>Boys reported increasingly feeling alienated from adults and their communities as they got older.</p>	<p><b>9) Schools should develop strong links with parents and local communities and should try to link lessons to real life experiences as much as possible.</b></p>
<p><u>Disciplinary procedures</u> were considered to be focused only on punishing behaviour and not focused on having supportive resolution of issues.</p>	<p><b>10) Positive behaviour policy procedures should be clear, immediate and set within a restorative context that is nurturing and relational.</b></p> <p>Where possible pupils should be involved in the revision of policies, sanction and rewards.</p>
<p>The majority of boys reported that they feel <u>school is a safe place</u>, and that bullying is a relatively minor issue, perpetrated by a small number of boys on a small number of boys. However for those involved in bullying, it had a profound impact</p>	<p><b>11) Building on the fact that school is perceived as a relatively safe place, schools should provide opportunities for boys to discuss issues in relation to violence, effects of violence and coping</b></p>

<p>on their lives and learning.</p> <p><u>Addressing violence and the nature of violence</u> may help reduce acts of perceived violence in schools as boys become more aware of the effects of violence on themselves and others.</p> <p>Overall, boys had a complex understanding and attitude towards different manifestations of violence and felt disconnected from the peace process.</p> <p>Boys were unclear about differences between perceived acts of violence and ‘messaging around.’</p> <p>The majority of those who experienced being a victim of violent acts did not talk to anyone about the incident.</p>	<p><b>strategies.</b></p> <p>This should include raising awareness of violence associated with bullying, sectarianism, race, homophobia, the legacy of the troubles, peacebuilding and the growing immigrant population.</p>
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## Conclusion

This five year longitudinal study tracked 378 boys from nine post-primary schools across Northern Ireland investigating their educational experiences and factors that impacted upon their social, physical, psychological and emotional well-being. The study used a mixed and creative methodology that aimed to give a voice to boys whose views are often absent from research and academic studies.

As evidenced in this report, factors that impact upon boys’ educational underachievement are complex and must be considered within a wider context of socio-economic issues such as poverty, class, ethnicity, social disadvantage, a declining industrial base and less demand for traditional male jobs. With the decline of traditional industry in Northern Ireland and the shift in favour of new knowledge economies, the value of education is arguably greater than it ever has been.

While for several decades boy’s underachievement has regularly been raised as a problem it was extremely difficult for the research team to find specific strategies addressing boys’ underachievement. Although teachers who were interviewed as part of this study recognised the predominance of boys with lower academic achievement, they generally did not take this into account in terms of learning styles or teaching approaches. There were also few examples of studies in Northern Ireland that focus specifically on how children learn about gender. Type of school (grammar and secondary), religion and poverty have drawn the focus of attention and may be seen as being more significant in understanding boys’ underachievement. The downside to this approach may be a lack of focus on targeting and engaging particular groups such as underachieving boys.

While there are perhaps no simple solutions to reduce the achievement gap between boys and girls, finding practical and realistic ways to support those who have fallen behind in school is undoubtedly a fundamental component in addressing educational underachievement. While identifying underachievement is based on a teacher’s professional judgement at every phase of education, strategies for addressing underachievement must begin during early years’ education and be supported by primary and post-primary schools in partnership with parents and communities. This is essential if boys and young men are to be supported to achieve their potential and find their place in an increasingly competitive global economy.

The 2009 DE policy document 'Every School a Good School' sets out a solution for raising standards and narrowing the performance gap. However, while standards for boys and girls have risen over recent years, and despite a suite of recent DE policies and papers addressing Literacy and Numeracy (see DE, 2009, 2010, 2011) highlighting boys as a specific target, it is evident that a core number of boys continue to under-perform academically and therefore need, and desire, more effective ways of engaging them in education and learning.

The social context of these boys' lives had a strong bearing upon their thoughts, beliefs and attitudes towards education and learning. However because this social context was seldom addressed in the classroom, boys perceived school as being disconnected from the reality of their everyday lives and experiences.

Despite a changing political context of peacebuilding in Northern Ireland, boys voiced ongoing concerns about their personal safety and reported various forms of violence simply '*as the way it is.*' Boys spoke of ongoing incidences of sectarianism and being fearful of paramilitaries. They reported increased levels of racial conflict. Boys also spoke of feeling alienated from their communities and distant from the world of adults and decision making processes. This alienation was underpinned by a perception from boys that adults increasingly viewed them with suspicion and distrust, particularly as they got older - a perception that was also apparent in attitudes towards the police and young men from different communities. While it is important that adolescent boys are accepted and promoted as part of communities and family life, at present there appears to be little in place to facilitate this process.

It is widely acknowledged that much of what young people learn occurs outside of formal education. In this study interventions by experienced youth workers demonstrated the value and benefits of youth work methodologies in addressing everyday issues that impacted directly upon these adolescent boys' lives. Whilst these results are promising, we acknowledge that this was a small-scale study. There is perhaps more research required to highlight the specific role that youth work can play to complement the formal education sector in order that its principles and methodologies can be better understood by policy and decision makers.

While some of the findings in this study may also apply to girls, the focus is firmly on boys. The report has captured boys' thoughts, beliefs and aspirations about their school and life experiences as well as their sense of fun and energy. However the report also records their frustrations, anxieties and at times despair. This was particularly evident for Year 10 boys who perceived they had already fallen behind with their education and felt unable to catch up. Whether they perceived this was due to their lack of interest in education, or because they were not able to cope with the demands of education, the consequences of not achieving 5 or more A\*- C GCSE's or their equivalent had become very apparent for these boys. It was this awareness that made them feel increasingly anxious about transitions beyond school and reflect more deeply about how prepared they were for the future.

The report makes recommendations aimed at schools, principals, policy makers and practitioners which have important pedagogical implications for teaching, engaging and working with boys. It also offers many pragmatic and cost neutral ways to support teachers in the classroom to help boys make better connections between school and their wider social, emotional and developmental needs. This is not to suggest that this will be easy. Rather it may mean all those who are concerned about boys being more committed to '*Taking Boys Seriously*' and becoming more conscious of the need to find creative and gender specific ways to engage, support and excite boys throughout their education and development.

## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

### **1.0 Background**

This report presents the findings of a five year longitudinal study conducted by the Centre for Young men's Studies and funded by the Department of Education and the Department of Justice (formerly the Northern Ireland Office). The research was initiated in response to concerns about boys' educational underachievement and wider concerns about their health and well-being.

The Centre for Young Men's Studies (CYMS) is located within the subject of Community Youth Work which resides within the School of Sociology and Applied Social Studies at the University of Ulster. The Centre aims to promote the voice, needs and interests of boys and young men through research that will inform practice, training and policy.

For several decades concerns about working class boys' academic performance has generated much debate for educationalists, writers and researchers. In addition, there has been increased global interest in regard to why statistics consistently reveal that from an early age, girls are outperforming boys in school at practically every level.

While there have always been boys who underachieve, this has become much more apparent, and arguably more problematic in a post-industrial society with a decline in traditionally male dominated manual and unskilled jobs. Unlike the 1970's, there is now a direct correlation between low qualifications and joblessness and being trapped in low pay and unskilled work. Young adult unemployment has risen sharply across the United Kingdom from 2007. The increase in unemployment among young males from Northern Ireland was not only greater than the rise in female unemployment in Northern Ireland, but also higher than the UK average increase in young male unemployment. Prolonged and complex transitions beyond school further expose those who underachieve by defining them with labels such as 'NEETS', or 'Status O', to reflect their low ranking in terms of social status.

Of further concern are the pressures and contradictions many boys experience as they attempt to live up to unrealistic and unattainable stereotypical expectations of men and masculinity. Four decades of social upheaval, paramilitary influence and sectarianism has also had a profound effect upon the construction of masculine identities in Northern Ireland, particularly in working class areas with disproportionate levels of social disadvantage. A negative picture of boys and young men is often exacerbated by a media that has contributed to wider public concerns about boys linked to crime levels and anti-social behaviour.

In conducting this research the Centre for Young Men's Studies placed firm emphasis on listening and responding to the voices of the boys who participated in this study. Our focus was on recognising 'what works' - as identified by boys - and on developing practical ways to support boys to reach their potential. Therefore a creative mixed methodology was designed that focussed not only on boys' educational experiences, but also on their social, physical, psychological and emotional well-being during their five year experiences of post-primary education.

The specific objectives of the research were to increase our understanding of:

- Factors that may contribute to male academic underachievement and finding practical ways to address this
- The value of education and how school can become a more positive learning experience
- Non-formal educational approaches



- Male transitions through post primary school; beyond post primary school to higher education/work and factors that impact upon future employment aspirations; and transitions from boy to man
- How experiences of violence in a post-conflict society impact upon education and learning

We present recommendations in this report that we believe will support educators to engage boys more effectively in their learning as well as enabling boys to make better connections between school and their wider social, emotional and developmental needs. Along with the recommendations, Section Nine of the report offers a list of practical, and in many cases cost-neutral considerations for implementing these recommendations that are primarily aimed at principals, teachers, practitioners and policymakers. We would stress that while some of the findings in this study may also apply to girls, the focus of this report is firmly on boys' post-primary school and life experiences.

### **1.1 *Boys across the years***

The authors would like to make some general comments on the overall development of these adolescent boys across the five years of this study. Physical changes were very apparent to the research team as these boys developed into young men. While rapid increases in size, shape, body hair and levels of maturity were very evident from year to year, the self-reported physical well-being of the sample was generally below the UK average.

Less apparent were the internal emotional pressures these boys experienced during early to mid-adolescence. While the majority of boys reported feeling happy and healthy at school, the percentage of boys reporting 'abnormal' levels of 'Hyperactivity' and 'conduct problems' was higher than the UK percentage norm. Boys were ambivalent about seeking personal support and struggled to know what to do when they got into trouble. Throughout the study boys reported being easily distracted and lacking concentration in the classroom. They also believed that many school subjects were unconnected to the reality of their everyday lives and experiences. It is noteworthy that levels of misbehaviour amongst the boys dropped significantly across the years.

Boys' perceptions of their personal safety also shifted across the years. The insecurities and excitement boys initially felt about the transition from primary to post-primary school did not cause them too much concern, particularly when processes were in place to support this transition. Year 8 and 9 boys spoke of the playground as the place where they felt most insecure and they said they would like to have their own morning and lunchtime breaks separate from older boys, as they perceived most bullying comes from other boys during these times. They also suggested and welcomed opportunities for boys in Year 11 and 12 to support and mentor younger boys in school and during breaks.

Quantitative data analysis showed a reduction in reported incidents of bullying as boys progressed through school. In focus groups boys spoke of their need to feel safe and be free from bullying in school. This was very important to boys. All participants believed that for those boys who experienced bullying, it was perhaps the most significant barrier to their learning. While boys believed school could be at times intimidating, school was generally perceived as a safer place than their local communities.

As boys got older significant changes occurred in regard to how they perceived relationships with parents and their peers. Whereas boys felt closest to both their parents in Year 8, this changed to being closest to their mother in Year 12. However, the person boys were most likely to confide in for support or when they got into trouble also changed from the mother in Year 8 to friends by Year 12.

It was also apparent that as these boys got older they sought and expected a different type of relationship with teachers and other adults in their lives. From Year 10 in particular they increasingly desired a relationship with adults based on mutual respect and recognition of qualities and talents these boys possessed other than their educational capabilities. They also wanted to be given more responsibility and to be more involved in decision making processes that affect their lives. Throughout the study it was found that the nature of a boy's relationship with a teacher was closely correlated to the extent to which he liked the subject they taught.

Each year of the study the boys placed greater importance on gaining qualifications. Year 10 was identified as a key period in regard to making the right decisions about GCSE selection. For some this led to a greater focus on their ambitions and specific targets. However not every boy felt ready to make these choices and when reflecting back on this period, some boys believed they had not made the right choices. Others believed that because they had previously fallen behind with certain subjects it was unlikely they would catch up in time for GCSE exams. It was notable that the psychological well-being of the overall sample dipped at Year 10, suggesting this was a particularly stressful period for the boys. The full consequences of boys believing they may not do well in GCSEs became very apparent in Years 11 and 12 as boys became more aware of the implications of this in regard to their future aspirations and career opportunities. It was this realisation that made some boys feel resigned to what they believed to be an inevitable failure and question the overall value of their time at school.

The study also focussed on how boys were experiencing the transition from boy to man. In early adolescence these boys appeared to readily accept and reinforce masculine stereotypical notions of men such as power, status, money and heterosexuality. Homophobic attitudes were obvious throughout the study. However, by mid adolescence some of the male stereotypes became less accepted and increased thought was given to the more intellectual, abstract and moral themes of masculinity, which are not determined by stereotypes. This suggests that as boys' mature, it is important they are supported to explore and challenge some of the behaviour and stereotypical attitudes they formed during early adolescence.

Boys spoke of feeling increasingly alienated within their communities and experiencing higher levels of suspicion and distrust directed towards them by adults. Throughout the study boys struggled to differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable levels of violence. While certain forms of violence were often perceived as a 'normal' part of male youth culture, differences between what constituted a violent act and what constituted 'messaging around' became increasingly blurred.

Also concerning for these boys were the challenges they expected to face in a rapidly changing world where costs of going to university are increasing and job prospects are more restricted in an unstable economy with high levels of youth unemployment.

While throughout this longitudinal study there was always humour and occasional incidences of bravado and 'messaging around,' boys were enthusiastic and engaged actively in all aspects of the research. They applied themselves attentively when filling in questionnaires and became more measured in their responses each year. In focus groups and in particular the classroom interventions with youth workers, boys were willing to discuss sensitive and potentially controversial issues with honesty, openness and maturity. As they got older their thinking and understanding matured and deepened. It was also apparent that as these boys matured they had formed strong and deeply held beliefs and opinions on many issues, and when asked or encouraged to speak, they had lots to say.

## SECTION 2: METHODOLOGY

### **2.0 Research Framework**

This single sample longitudinal study was administered over a five year period (2006–2011), with data collected from the same cohort of boys in each of the five years (see participating schools section).

The study utilised a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods including:

- Six questionnaires including internationally validated psychometric tests and customised sections
- Focus groups within six of the schools every year of the study
- Interviews with six Year Ten Head Teachers
- A case study of an All-Boys secondary School, and
- Youth work interventions delivered in two of the nine schools,

In addition to the questionnaires, two of the schools agreed to participate in youth work intervention sessions over the five years of the study. This enabled the research team to take advantage of an experimental design that underpinned the initial research aims. In addition to administering the questionnaires, sessions were delivered three times per year by experienced youth workers from YouthAction. These sessions focused on developmental issues emanating from the quantitative data and revealed the positive impact and potential benefits to the boys who participated.

### **2.1 Research informed by boys**

From the outset, the research team wanted this study to reflect the boys' experiences, and focus on what they considered to be important. This was achieved through two methods, firstly via a research steering group of young male volunteers from YouthAction, and secondly through a 'Gapper' who worked as a volunteer during the pilot study.<sup>1</sup>

The 'Gapper' influenced the research in a number of ways. Firstly, by suggesting areas for exploration including attitudes towards schooling and the Transfer procedure. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, he helped with the design and content of the questionnaire and focus group interview schedules.

In order to inform the initial research topics, YouthAction Northern Ireland's Young Men's Forum was invited to provide feedback and direction. This steering group consisted of 12 young men from a variety of backgrounds, and who were involved as youth volunteers in a number of different communities. Members included those representing young fathers, individuals working with boys and young men at risk of anti-social behaviour, and those working with excluded boys and young men living in rural areas. The input from the Young Men's Forum enabled the research questions to better reflect the diverse range of adolescent male experiences.

### **2.2 Participants and sampling**

The sample consisted each year of between 340–378 adolescent males. Numbers varied each year according to attendance on the days of data collection. The sample consisted of two major religious groups, which averaged Catholic 54% and Protestant 36% with 10% reporting 'other.'

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<sup>1</sup> The 'Gapper' was a young man who was given work experience during a one year break between his academic studies as part of The Rank Foundation Gap Scheme. The Gapper volunteered for nine months dividing his time between the Centre for Young Men's Studies and YouthAction Northern Ireland. During this time he was trained in certain aspects youth work and in research methodology and research design, while helping with the research project itself.

Schools for inclusion in the study were selected from Department of Education schools database to include a mix of schools that were predominantly Catholic or Protestant or urban or rural, grammar or non-grammar. Initially eight schools agreed to participate in the study. This was increased to nine schools in Year Two of the study in order to address a religious imbalance of the sample in Year One.

Participating schools received a letter containing a brief description of the study and consent was sought from parents and participants. These forms had to be completed in the affirmative for a participant to take part. Consent forms were returned to the key contact teacher in each school and those who returned the forms committed to taking part in the study. All participants were debriefed verbally about potential issues arising from the research. Participants were also given an information sheet of approved support contacts for young people. Data was collected during May and June each year.

### **2.3 Questionnaires**

Six questionnaires with different themes were used to collect the quantitative data. This happened each year of the study during one visit to each school in May or June:

- The About Me questionnaire (Appendix 1) – background and family information
- The KIDSCREEN Quality of Life questionnaire (Appendix 2) for adolescents (Rajmil et al, 2004)
- The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Appendix 3) (Goodman, 1997) was used to assess emotional and behavioural issues.
- Questionnaire enquiring about school experiences, preferences, post-school aspirations (Appendix 4).
- Being a Man questionnaire (Appendix 5) exploring perceptions of ‘masculinity and what it means to be a man.’
- Violence Questionnaire (Appendix 6) seeking to understand how adolescent males conceptualise their perceptions of violence and their personal experiences of violence, being in trouble and bullying.

The Quality of Life and Strengths and Difficulties questionnaires have good reliability and validity scores that are compared with available UK norms. They are also acceptable for a wide range of purposes ranging from screening to diagnostic analysis (Woods and White, 2005).

The Schools questionnaire, Being a Man questionnaire and Violence questionnaire were developed in conjunction with young men and through a literature review, prior ethnographic and pilot research and designed to take account of any literacy problems or difficulties.

### **2.4 Focus groups**

Focus groups were held each year of the study to further develop issues emerging from the quantitative data. This process began in Year One and continued throughout the study. Being aware from previous studies that some boys and young men may be reluctant to talk about certain potentially controversial issues (e.g. Harland, 1997), the Centre collaborated with YouthAction’s ‘Work with Young Men’s team to help with data collection. Before the study commenced, the Centre for Young Men’s Studies research team provided training for all interviewers.

Focus groups were conducted each year within the school setting, typically in a small room or library, and consisted of between 5-7 adolescent males and one interviewer. The boys who participated in the focus groups were selected randomly by teaching staff each year. An average of 15 focus groups consisting of 76 boys from the sample schools participated in the focus groups each year. This enabled the research team to elicit and expand upon boy’s views on their ongoing experiences at school, building upon specific issues emanating from the quantitative data in each year of the study. Over the five years of the study 77 focus groups participated in the study. Focus group discussions in Years 1–3 of the study lasted approximately 40 minutes. This increased to 50-60

minutes in Years 4 and 5. Respondents were encouraged to ask questions, as well as offer their opinions on a range of subjects.

## **2.5 Interviews with Year Ten Teachers**

In Year three of the study, semi structured interviews were carried out by Trefor Lloyd (Associate of Centre for Young Men's Studies at the time) with Head Teachers of Year Ten boys in six schools. Interviews ranged from one to one and a half hours and all teachers were very experienced (with at least ten years teaching – usually in their current schools). Four were male and two were female. The purpose of these interviews was to elicit from teachers their understanding of why certain males may underachieve in schools.

## **2.6 Case study of All-Boys Secondary School**

Also in Year three of the study a case study was carried out by Trefor Lloyd with a range of staff in an urban all-boys secondary school. This school was chosen because it has been particularly successful in improving educational attainment amongst adolescent boys. The catchment area included a number of wards where unemployment, poverty, educational underachievement and the troubles have impacted for more than a generation.

## **2.7 Youth Work Interventions**

Youth work interventions were delivered three times per year in classrooms in two of the participating schools. These typically lasted two hours. The purpose of these sessions was to elicit how the themes emanating from the quantitative questionnaires could be further explored through non-formal educational youth work approaches. Methods were adapted from approaches delivered and tested by YouthAction's previous work with adolescent males. These sessions involved small group work, work in pairs, kinaesthetic approaches, artistic expression, story-telling and role playing. All sessions were designed to encourage discussion and increase participation through a methodology that encouraged safe risk taking, personal disclosure and experimentation. From Year one there was strong emphasis on a relational approach which encouraged honesty and trust building. This led to more in-depth issue based interventions in subsequent years focusing on increasingly complex aspects of adolescent development such as violence, conflict and safety issues and what it means to be a man.

## **2.8 Data Analysis**

Questionnaire responses were uploaded and analysed using the computerised package Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and data investigated using the appropriate statistical tools.

Information from the youth work intervention sessions was collected through direct feedback from participants, materials produced by the participants on flip charts, researcher observation, recorded documentation from the youth workers and direct verbal feedback from teachers. This approach enabled the research team to build stronger relationships with boys from year to year and provide opportunities to reflect upon issues emanating from the questionnaires.

Each focus group was taped using digital recording equipment, and then transcribed and analysed using Content Analysis to summarise the main contents of data and their messages (Cohen et al, 2011).

## **2.9 Ethical approval**

For ethical approval to be granted ten areas of interest were required by the University of Ulster's Research Governance department. An application was submitted to the University of Ulster's Ethics Committee prior to the study commencing in Year One. Ethical approval was attained that enabled

data collection to begin at the end of the research sample's first year at post-primary school.

## **2.10 Participating schools**

Schools for inclusion in the study were selected from Department of Education schools database according to school type, management type and urban/rural location. Nine post-primary schools participated in this study. The type of school, location and number of boys are listed in the table below. The table also indicates the degree of multiple deprivation in the area in which the school is located according to the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation measure (2010) gathered from Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS). Available from: [www.nisra.gov.uk](http://www.nisra.gov.uk)

To avoid schools being identified the 890 SOA rankings have been divided into groupings with Group 1 being the most deprived Social Output Area (SOA) and Group 7 being the least deprived SOA area.

<b>School type</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Percentage of Boys in sample</b>	<b>Multiple deprivation according to Social Output Area</b>
All-boys Secondary	Urban	11	Group 1
All-boys Secondary	Urban	22	Group 1
All-Boys Grammar	Rural / semi-rural	13	Group 1
Co-educational Grammar	Urban	15	Group 5
Co-educational Secondary	Rural / semi-rural	9	Group 1
Co-educational Secondary	Rural / semi-rural	2	Group 1
Co-educational Integrated	Rural / semi-rural	12	Group 1
Co-educational Secondary	Rural/semi-rural	6	Group 3
Co-educational Secondary	Rural / semi-rural	10	Group 2

The participating schools represented a mix of secondary and grammar, controlled and maintained, urban and rural, integrated, and all-boys and co-educational.

## **SECTION 3: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **3.0 *Introduction to literature***

This review of literature provides a context for the development of recent debates and educational policy in regard to boys' underachievement. It also provides evidence of boys' underachievement and an overview of the wider social environment and the challenges and complexities which impact upon boys' development such as experiences of violence and the construction of masculine identities. This review also provides a brief overview of recent Department of Education policy.

### **3.1 *Poverty and educational disadvantage***

Northern Ireland is a society emerging from a prolonged period of conflict towards a new era of peacebuilding. While the drive towards a shared future is underpinned by a new political dispensation, there remain many challenges. The Northern Ireland Executive initiated its first Programme for Government (2008 – 2011) with an over-arching aim to build a peaceful, fair and prosperous society. The programme identified 'growing the economy' as its top priority alongside other priorities such as promoting tolerance, health and well-being, and tackling disadvantage and poverty. The Programme for Government states that building a strong economy requires a healthy, well educated population.

While many young people consistently achieve high levels of academic success in Northern Ireland, there are those who do not. Crucially however, understanding why certain young people underachieve is complex. Socio-economic factors such as poverty, ethnicity and unemployment, extended youth to adult transitions, increasing trends in youth suicide (particularly amongst young males), under age pregnancies, homelessness, youth crime, sectarianism, violence, negative attitudes towards young people and levels of educational attainment all significantly shape young peoples' general health and quality of life.

The link between poverty and educational achievement is well established. Horgan (2007) interviewed 220 children aged four to eleven from schools in advantaged and disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland, and found a strong link between poverty and school experience. International evidence demonstrates that these disparities are found across all developed countries (UNICEF, 2008).

Goodman & Gregg (2010) report that educational deficits emerge early in children's lives, even before entry into school, and widen throughout childhood. By the age of three there is a considerable gap in cognitive test scores between children in the poorest fifth of the population compared with those from better-off backgrounds. This gap widens as children enter and move through the schooling system, especially during primary school years.

Analysis of the UK Millennium Cohort Study (2008) showed big differences in cognitive development between children from rich and poor backgrounds at the age of three, and this gap widened by age five. This study also found similar large gaps in young children's social and emotional well-being at these ages.

Horgan (2011) argues that Northern Ireland has a much higher proportion of children living in persistent poverty than is the case in Britain, with more than one in five (21%) of children and young people, over twice the proportion in Britain (9%) living in persistent poverty. Horgan further argues that the interaction of poverty with the legacy of the conflict means that young people in Northern Ireland continue to live in segregation in areas with high levels of disability and chronic physical and mental ill-health. Horgan's study revealed that almost one in ten young people whose family

depends on benefits left school with no educational qualifications and were more likely to be suspended or expelled from school.

Free school meal entitlement is used as a measure of social disadvantage. A statistical press release by the Department of Education (March, 2011) on school meal entitlement in Northern Ireland, revealed that across all sectors (excluding special schools) 64,139 pupils (20.2% of the total school roll) were entitled to free school meals. Horgan argues that the qualifications of school leavers indicate that pupils entitled to free school meals are considerably more likely to achieve less than those not entitled. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2012) also found that children in Northern Ireland receiving free school meals are much more likely not to attain expected levels of educational qualifications and in 2010 69% of pupils on free school meals did not achieve five GCSE's or more at A\*-C (including maths and English) (DE, Qualifications and destinations of Northern Ireland schools leavers).

### **3.2 Adolescent Development**

Adolescence begins with the onset of puberty. It is a transitional stage in a person's life between childhood and adulthood that differs according to culture (Coleman, 2011). Theorists consistently report that the transition from childhood to adulthood is increasingly delayed and there is no defined point at which an adolescent becomes an adult (Furlong, 2009; Mortimer, 2009; Coleman, 2011). This has led many theorists to acknowledge three distinct stages consisting of early, mid and late adolescence. Since Stanley Hall's first theorising of adolescence at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, writers have argued that adolescence has become increasingly characterised with complexity, uncertainty and risk through extended school to work transitions; difficulties entering the labour market and the reduced capacity for young adults to afford property outside the parental home (e.g. Julkunen, 2009).

Studies reveal that children and adolescents thrive when they experience reliable, stable and loving relationships with whomever it is that looks after them (Burrows, et al, 2011). Social relationships, particularly with peers and parents, change significantly as do societal expectations about how adolescents should behave as they mature. This often leads to a 'clash of expectations' between adolescents and their families, communities and schools about how they should behave.

Mental and physical health and delinquent behaviour during adolescence have been closely linked to a number of factors such as unhelpful parental behaviour, physical, emotional and sexual abuse, neglect, domestic violence, loss, and environmental stresses such as socio-economic status and pressures associated with peer groups and addictive substances, risk taking and educational performance (Geldard and Geldard, 2010, p19-28). Anxiety surrounding academic performance has also been known to cause status anxiety, depression and withdrawal amongst young people (Harris, 2011). Anxiety during adolescence is often overlooked as simply belonging to the 'internalising behaviours' of teenagers whereas external behaviour is often identified within the school or family (Heller and Rozas, 2010).

Periods of rapid growth, change, imbalance or disruption are known as transitions. The way in which an individual manages transitions will be dependent upon a range of factors including, 'one's physical health, personality, family and cultural background as well as their personal and social circumstances at the time of the transition' (Coulson & Hallam, 2011: 36). During early adolescence all young people experience some form of school transition from primary to post-primary school. While many children report anxieties about this transition, these appear to be temporary with only a minority of between 12%-25% underperforming once entering post primary school (Evangelou, et al, 2008). Flammer and Alsaker (2006) identify three key factors contributing to successful primary to post-primary transitions:



- supportive parents
- having friends who are making the same transition, and
- primary schools that prepare children in advance of the transition.

Coleman (2011) argues that in order to understand adolescent transitions, it is important to appreciate some of the key features of adolescent development at the ages of 11–12. Coleman argues, for example, ‘girls are likely to be more mature than boys at this stage and the physical changes associated with puberty may in some cases lead to uncertainty, lack of confidence self-consciousness and anxiety for many adolescents’ (p, 162).

As in early years, adolescent brain activity increases profoundly enabling adolescents to balance complex ideas, control impulses and take a more reasoned approach to life (Weinberger et al, 2005). These authors conclude that in order to achieve this adolescents need to be surrounded by caring adults and institutions that help them learn specific skills and appropriate adult behaviour and identify what specific systems and practices will best support them to grow and mature in appropriate ways (p3). Brain development may help explain increased risk taking behaviour during adolescence and why adolescents perceive the world differently to adults (Coulson & Hallam, 2011), and why they are more likely to experience rapidly shifting emotional states and significant changes in thinking and reasoning (Coleman, 2011).

In addition to the above, it is important to note that not all boys go through adolescence at the same pace, or experience physiological, biological, psychological, cognitive, emotional, sexual and hormonal changes at the same time. This is perhaps an obvious, but important observation, as it suggests that adolescent males should not be perceived as a homogenous group, which has important implications for pedagogy, educational curriculum, resource allocation and adolescent / adult relationships.

### **3.3 Evidence of the underperformance of boys**

58% of undergraduates starting university in UK are girls (ONS, 2010). Girls in Northern Ireland are consistently more likely to achieve five or more A\*-C grades in GCSE results than their male counterparts. Since the mid 1990’s girls have on average been 10-13 percentage points ahead of boys.

While boy’s underachievement has, since 1997, regularly been raised as a problem, the solution has continually been incorporated into a generalist approach, rather than a targeted one. The adoption of Every School a Good School (DE, 2009) has confirmed this. Taking a social justice and equality approach, and underpinned by an understanding based on the link between disadvantage and educational outcomes and issue-based approaches, such as tackling barriers to learning, on the surface appear substantive. However, the downside to this approach may be a lack of focus on targeting and engaging particular groups such as underachieving boys.

In his review of research evidence in Northern Ireland, Gallagher (1997; 1998) concluded that boys ‘apparent’ underachievement was probably as a result of testing and assessment and a ‘possible’ anti-school culture among boys. Drawing heavily from Murphy and Elwood (1996), Gallagher highlighted gender differences in, for example, styles of writing and the way these are then assessed as accounting for some of the gender gaps in exam results. Gallagher recommended a review of the examination and assessment systems used in Northern Ireland and also suggested that girls more positive attitudes towards school had a distinct advantage. He also suggested that for some boys ‘anti-school subcultures and peer-group pressures’ were possible barriers to achievement.

A brief review was produced for the Northern Ireland Assembly (2001) exploring the ‘gender gap’ and looking to ‘prevent underachievement amongst boys.’ This drew from a random selection of

studies from England, Scotland, and New Zealand and suggested a range of issues including the lack of male teachers; gender stereotyping by teachers; assessment favouring girls; boys rejecting authority and girls co-operation as contributing factors in boys underachievement.

Boys and literacy had been a focussed concern for the Northern Ireland Audit Office and House of Commons Public Accounts Committee since 2006 (see NIAO, 2006) and the Department of Education had mentioned boys as a priority, but not made a specific recommendation within its Literacy and Numeracy strategy and action plan issued in March 2007 (DE, 2007).

In 2008 The Department of Education commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers to analyse, and make recommendations to address the 'long tail' of underachievement in Northern Ireland schools and highlighted boys as a specific target group in the brief. While the 48 recommendations concentrated on both a systems and a school level, the only recommendation that mentioned boys was to 'identify appropriate male role models for boys, internally and externally, to promote the concept of reading for pleasure.' A Chief Inspector's Report (2010) made little mention of boys. More recent papers addressing Literacy and Numeracy (see DE, 2009, 2010, 2011) have highlighted boys as a specific target, but did not identify a specific strategy to address this. The DE policy approach through 'Every School a Good School' (2009) also appears to suggest that ways to address underachievement is the same regardless of gender or socio-economic group in that solutions lie in high-quality teaching and well-led schools.

The Northern Ireland Audit Office (2006) found that improving numeracy and literacy standards remains a major challenge for schools in Northern Ireland. In particular the report acknowledged that 'the performance of boys continues to lag significantly behind that of girls' (p, 1). This report revealed that in 2004-05 23% of children - around 2000 girls and 3500 boys left primary school with literacy skills below the standard Level 4 - the stage at which the first signs of gender performance between boys and girls are perceptible (p 2). This document also highlighted that the performance of boys compared to girls widened between Key Stage 2 for pupils aged 11 and Key Stage 3 for pupils aged 14. The Department of Education, while recognising that many schools operate in very difficult socio-economic circumstances acknowledged that further measures were necessary to raise standards (p, 2). The report also identified significant differences between Protestant and Catholic young people in socio-economically deprived areas at GCSE level in English and Maths. These findings are further substantiated by research commissioned by OFMDFM (2001) which found that 'the educational non-progressor to higher education was most likely to be a Protestant working class male.' Findings from a working group into Protestant male underachievement ten years later issued by Dawn Purvis former MLA into educational disadvantage amongst working class Protestant boys in 2011, presented a 'Call to Action' in response to the following concerns:

- The underachievement of males
- The significant differences between Protestant and Catholic children in socio-economically deprived areas at GCSE English and Maths
- The extent of the gap between the poorest and best performing schools

While achievement in Northern Ireland continues to improve from a relatively high base, figures conceal some more concerning statistics about boys' underachievement.

Table 1 below reveals, for the key GCSE indicators during the five year span of (2006–2010) there was at least a 10-13.8 point percentage difference between males and females, although achievement for both genders has improved over time and there is evidence the gap has narrowed somewhat. However, even as recently as 2009/10, over a third, 34.6 per cent of boys left school without achieving five or more GCSE's at grades A\*-C or equivalent, compared to 21.7 per cent of girls.

**Table 1**                      **2005/06**                      **2006/07**                      **2007/ 08**                      **2008/09**                      **2009/10**

<b>GCSE PERFORMANCE BY GENDER</b>																
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Diff</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Diff</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Diff</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Diff</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Diff</b>	
% achieving 5 + GCSEs A*-C or equivalent	57.5	71.2	13.8	58.2	71.5	13.3	60	73.8	13.8	64.4	75.9	11.5	65.4	78.3	12.9	
% achieving 5 + A*-C or equivalent (including GCSE English and maths)	47	58.4	11.4	49	59.6	10.6	50.2	62.6	12.3	53.4	64.7	11.3	53.4	64.7	11.3	

(DE, Qualifications and Destinations of Northern Ireland School leavers)

Table 2 below shows the differences between pupils attending different types of post-primary school. Over the five year period, grammar schools experienced only a very small increase in the number of boys achieving five or more GCSE's, but given the very high starting point of 94 per cent in 2006, this is not surprising. Secondary schools experienced a 10.5 percentage point increase, however, this is from a much lower starting point (35.8%). GCSE results demonstrate that girls continue to outperform boys.

**Table 2**                      **2005/06**                      **2006 07**                      **2007/ 08**                      **2008/09**                      **2009/10**

<b>GCSE PERFORMANCE BY SCHOOL</b>																
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Diff</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Diff</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Diff</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Diff</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Diff</b>	
% achieving 5 + GCSEs A*-C or equiv																
<b>Grammar</b>	94.0	98.2	4.0	95.0	98.0	3.0	94.7	98.2	3.4	96.0	98.0	2.0	95.4	98.4	3.0	
% achieving 5 + A*-C or equivalent																
<b>Secondary</b>	35.8	53.2	17.3	36.3	53.2	17.0	38.7	57.0	18.2	43.4	59.5	16.1	46.3	63.8	17.5	
% achieving 5+ A*-C or equivalent (including GCSE English and maths)																
<b>Grammar</b>	87.1	91.7	4.6	90.1	94.0	3.9	90.3	95.3	5.1	91.5	95.1	3.5	91.9	96.0	4.1	
% achieving 5 + A*-C or equivalent (including GCSE English and Maths)																
<b>Secondary</b>	23.3	36.0	12.7	24.5	35.9	11.4	25.7	39.9	14.1	27.5	40.5	13.0	28.9	41.9	13.0	

(DE, Qualifications and Destinations of Northern Ireland School leavers)

These trends in GCSE results seem to suggest that there is a persistent core of boys that are remaining untouched by current DE policy initiatives. While there is improvement in secondary schools across the time span, this may well be as a result of 'borderland' work (a concentration on those near to the 5 A\*-Cs level).

### **3.4 Reasons why boys are underachieving in Northern Ireland**

In 2006, a publication by the OFMDFM of its *Gender equality strategy: a strategic framework for action to promote gender equality for women and men 2006-2016* provided a framework of objectives by decision-makers and policy-makers in government to promote gender equality. The Department of Education produced a 'Gender equality action plan for women 2008-2011' and, in November 2008, the Equality Commission published *Every Child an Equal Child*, which highlighted that boys leaving school tend to be less qualified than girls and are less likely to progress to higher education. While these reports suggest that while there are a range of factors that can impact on boys and their education and teachers do take a child-specific approach, there may be some value in taking a gender specific approach. Researching one dimension (gender) may help to identify details

useful to policy makers and practitioners in ways that the equality framework may fall short. For example, Rugkasa et al (2003) explored ways in which ten and eleven year-olds in Northern Ireland expressed perceptions of gender ideology while discussing the topic of smoking. The authors concluded that in order to deliver successful health promotion interventions, it was crucial to understand and address differences based on gender as this may partly explain differences in smoking experimentation and prevalence.

Lloyd (2009) in a series of interviews (within this longitudinal study) with Heads of Year 10 in Northern Ireland secondary schools generally found an absence of an understanding of gender within strategies tackling underachievement. While interviewees recognised the predominance of boys in their lower sets, they generally did not take this into account in terms of learning styles or teaching approaches. There was a separation between identifying the problem and what strategies could be used to solve it.

A report on literacy and numeracy of pupils in Northern Ireland (PriceWaterHouse Coopers, 2008) (PwC) identified several reasons why some pupils are underachieving in Northern Ireland. These included, lack of parental involvement, a perceived lack of value placed on education in certain areas, particularly deprived Protestant areas, a shortage of role models, the impact of the troubles, a decline in readiness for pupils entering primary school, a lack of baseline data on young children, the transition between pre-school and primary and between primary and post-primary schools and a lack of strategic direction and consistency at system level.

The PwC report (2008) also highlighted the underperformance of boys in relation to girls offering several reasons from literature as to why boys may be underperforming. These included:

- perceptions of literacy activities as 'female'
- gender stereotyping on the part of teachers
- greater vulnerability of boys to poor teaching
- boys being less prepared to commence formal schooling
- changing patterns of employment and higher expectations of girls
- peer group culture
- the greater incidence of behavioural problems such as ADD / ADHD amongst boys
- a lack of role models including fathers and male teachers

The PwC report further suggested that a successful approach was likely to be based on initiatives delivered at the individual level focusing on individual boys or groups of boys, the classroom or pedagogical level, the whole school level and the system level.

Perry (2010:3) states that addressing underachievement in post-primary schools is particularly challenging and lists a broad and complex range of factors that contribute to educational attainment, several of which are at the heart of the 2009 DE policy document 'Every School a Good School':

- the importance of local contexts and circumstances
- school leadership
- classroom teaching
- personal qualities and core values of effective leaders with high respect for others
- emotional intelligence
- resilience
- personal conviction
- a culture of high expectations
- engagement with the wider community, and
- the development of improvement policies by the DE

The absence of men in schools and the importance of fathers' active involvement in their children's education has led to a call for more men in primary education (whether male teachers or fathers). The role model debate ('boys need men'), and strong advocates such as the Fatherhood Institute who have driven a number of initiatives, has not really been seen to be prominent in the debate in Northern Ireland. However figures released by the Department of Education (2010) found that there are 244 primary schools in Northern Ireland with no male teachers and men make up only 15% of teachers employed at primary schools. This announcement led to the then SDLP South Antrim MLA Thomas Burns calling for primary school teaching to be '*more attractive*' to men and this was not the first time this call had been made. Stranmillis University College launched a 'Males into Teaching' project aiming to promote teaching among the male student population which involved events and opportunity to shadow teachers in their work. These initiatives were as a result of government, teaching unions and parents becoming increasingly concerned at the small number of male teachers in Northern Ireland's schools.

The involvement or non-involvement of fathers in the education of their sons has been a much more recent issue in Northern Ireland but it seemingly has not really entered the boys' underachievement debate. However the Millennium Cohort Study Third Survey (2008) found that fathers in Northern Ireland read more to their five year olds every day compared to fathers in the rest of the UK.

### **3.5 Underachievement studies with boys in the UK**

In a review of underachievement in British literature Duckworth et al, (2009) found the most significant indicator of achievement was prior attainment. They also found strong and persistent links between attainment in primary school and GCSE results. This review also found young people were twice as likely to consider higher education if they believed their parents wanted them to stay in education. Successful strategies for raising boys' achievement included giving praise and rewards for achievement, giving students a voice and valuing their opinions, having a school ethos that expects boys to achieve and in which gender stereotypes are minimised, and the potential of parents as leverage among young people in low performing schools. Raising aspirations (of both parents and children) through programmes; the provision of incentives to stay in education beyond the age of 16; supporting the development of a good home learning environment; and targeted support in school all contributed to more successful outcomes for young people. The review suggests that targeted initiatives may be more successful than universal approaches and allow for a measure of flexibility according to local circumstances. However the authors note that this could foster greater potential for stigmatisation for local initiatives.

Lloyd (2012) highlights that girls continue to outperform boys at all levels of education in the UK from Key Stage 1 to higher education. He notes that boys are four times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than girls, and at least four times more likely to be diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Aged five, girls are ahead of boys in ten of the twelve Early Years Profiling measures and boys dominate speech delay initiatives. The commonly held view has been that boys come into school trailing girls particularly in communication and fine motor skills (required for writing), and that boys 'catch-up' when they are aged eight and nine. However, Lloyd suggests that recent studies show that an increasing number of boys are not 'catching up', with a small minority leaving primary school further behind than when they arrived.

Early assessments of child development are proving to be reliable indicators of future outcomes. While there is of course a risk of labelling children before they can walk and talk, these early assessments can be very effective indicators for the need of intervention. Lloyd has developed and evaluated early intervention practice in the UK targeting parents who have sons and supporting boys in Key stage 1 & 2 with behaviour problems as well as supporting teachers to get the best out of boys. The 'Boys Ready for Learning Project' assesses the skills boys need for learning, and targets

parents, teachers and the boys themselves. This project builds on this by targeting boys who find the transition into school problematic (particularly because of difficulties in regulating their emotions and behaviour).

More specifically the programme aims to:

- *Work directly with boys* – learning through rehearsal of skills, so for example creating ways for boys to practice and rehearse concentration skills, and then enable them to transfer these into the classroom.
- *Working directly with teachers* – teaching techniques and approaches that work generally with boys and help them identify ways of working with the individual.
- *Working directly with parents* – teaching techniques, especially those related to discipline and boundaries (too often they found that parents over talk and explain too much to boys, so the programme will teach firm discipline, builds parents confidence and makes them more effective). Evidence from this initiative suggests that while changes at home come into school, changes at school do not necessarily go home.

After a thorough assessment process, 4-5 specific areas are identified, so, for example, supporting parents to deliver more appropriate methods of discipline (often too harsh, or too soft); teaching boys self-control techniques and providing teachers with effective methods to ensure boys understand what is expected of them (often more direct and to the point, with less explanation).

Beneficiaries of this project are the targeted boys, their parents, and schools.

- *For the boys:* an increase in their skills for learning (based on the skills deficits within the Ready for Learning Plan); an increase in their achievement levels; a significant reduction in the number of behaviour-related incidents within both the classroom and the playground.
- *For the parents of boys:* an increase in their confidence to both understand their sons and deal with their behaviour and learning (discipline and boundaries; motivation and communication); an increase in their involvement and engagement with their sons learning in and out of school (parental involvement is a known critical factor in children's achievement).
- *For the school:* increased engagement of targeted boys (and their parents) in their classroom learning; a significant reduction in classroom incidents; less teacher time spent on behaviour-related incidents and a significant reduction in senior staff time spent on targeted boys behaviour and the consequences of this behaviour.

### **3.6 The Construction of Masculinities**

Over the past 30 years there has been a growing body of theoretical literature examining how interpretations of masculinity significantly impact upon mental health and wellbeing (Flood, 2007) with complex multi-faceted concepts of masculinities and what it means to be 'male' being developed (Kimmel, et al, 2005). In *Learning to Labour*, Willis (1977) showed how the boys in his study were actively constructing social class relations during the last two years of schooling and doing so in terms of their gender and social class identities. Their anti-school behaviour as they moved towards the end of schooling was interpreted by Willis as preparation for the '*resistance within accommodation*' that they would practice as workers within an industrial capitalist economy. Willis (1977) described the 'lads' and Connell (1989), the 'cool guys' as groupings that usually saw themselves as separate and often in conflict with teachers and the school. 'Laddish culture' and 'laddish behaviour' re-emerged in terms of drinking, anti-social behaviour and within schools as behaviour that impacted negatively on everyone within the classroom which became shorthand for

a predominantly working class masculine identity. Similar notions but with different descriptions that cut across race and culture, with Majors (2001) coining the phrase '*cool pose*'.

For several decades statistics have provoked a broad concern about boys and underachievement and there has been a longer discourse about boys in schools which goes back as far as the mid-1980s. Askew & Ross (1988) reflected an 'anti-sexist perspective' that saw boys' sexism as a reflection of the school as a patriarchal institution. By the mid-'90s this perspective had developed into a broader approach that had masculinities at its heart. Many studies demonstrated how school has been instrumental in the formation of masculine identities and the place where masculinities are actively made, negotiated, regulated and renegotiated (e.g. Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Salisbury & Jackson, 1996; Stoudt, 2006; Swain, 2006).

Harland and Morgan (2003) found in inner city Belfast, that while public expectations demand that families, schools and local communities were safe environments where young people are supported, encouraged, valued, mentored and loved, in reality, these settings were often hostile environments that left adolescent boys feeling marginalised, threatened and feeling the need to prove to others that they matched up to traditional masculine stereotypes. Harland (2008) further found that appreciating masculine 'contradictions' was pivotal for practitioners to better understanding the internal pressures that adolescent males experience in constructing their masculine identities and forming their attitudes towards school and learning.

### **3.7 Recent Department of Education Policy**

The following section provides a brief overview of recent DE policy and in particular the key policy document 'Every School a Good School' (2009).

In 2009 the Department of Education launched 'Every School a Good School – A Strategy for Raising Achievement'. In the Foreword the Minister of Education wrote that 'this policy lies at the centre of my reform agenda and is consistent not only with Articles 28 & 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child but also complements the Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People'. Within this Foreword she stressed that 'there is a strong link between disadvantage and educational outcomes' and she went on to commit the Department of Education to doing more to achieve equity within the educational system. Furthermore, she referred to barriers to learning that can inhibit young people that could arise from 'background, gender, sexual orientation or race.'

Every School a Good School (ESaGS) aims to improve educational outcomes for children and young people in lower socio-economic groups. The vision in this publication is of schools '*as vibrant, self-improving, well governed and effectively led communities of good practice, focusing not on institutions but on meeting the needs and aspirations of all pupils through high quality learning, recognizing the centrality of the teacher.*'

ESaGS is the Department's overarching policy for raising standards and tackling underachievement. It encourages all schools to put equality and the raising of standards at the heart of their self-evaluation and planning for improvement.

ESaGS aims to make a significant contribution to narrowing the gap in educational attainment levels and overcoming barriers to learning. This seminal policy document advocates a whole school approach for learning with particular focus on responding to the educational needs of children from socially disadvantaged areas who leave school lacking in skills and confidence. The ESaGS improvement policy (2009) is centred on six key areas:

- effective leadership and an ethos of aspiration and high achievement
- high quality teaching and learning

- tackling the barriers that many young people face
- embedding a culture of self-evaluation and self-assessment and of using performance and other information to effect improvement
- focusing clearly on support to help schools improve – with clarity about the place of more formal interventions where there is a risk that the quality of education offered in a school is not as high as it should be, and
- increasing engagement between schools, parents and families, recognising the powerful influence they and local communities exercise on educational outcomes.

The following characteristics of a successful school are highlighted in this document.

- *Child centred provision*
- *High quality teaching and learning*
- *Effective leadership*
- *A school connected to its local community*

Within each of these characteristics the document offers indicators for effective performance. So, for example, under *Child centred provision* the first indicator states that decisions on planning, resources, curriculum and pastoral care should be needs driven and reflecting the aspirations of pupils within a school. Another indicator would be that there is a commitment to involve young people in discussions and decisions on school life that directly affect them and to listen to their views. This latter point is consistent with Article 12 of the UNCRC and the right of the young person to have their voice heard on issues that affect them. Whilst the report is not prescriptive on how schools should do this e.g. Schools Councils, nonetheless there is a clear recommendation that schools are encouraged to find meaningful ways of giving pupils a voice and of listening and responding to those voices.

An example of indicators within *High quality teaching and learning* would be the importance of a school having a broad and relevant curriculum for pupils. It also refers to the need for enthusiastic teachers, enjoying a positive relationship with their pupils and teachers who were adaptable, and flexible with their teaching strategies.

*Effective leadership* indicators refer to the importance of teachers being given the opportunity to share in the leadership of the school

The Fourth characteristic *A School connected to its local community* has indicators such as the importance of good relationships that facilitate engagement and communication between school, parents and the wider community. It promotes school involvement in particular programmes that could effectively meet the needs of the community and collaborative working with others whose work impacts on education (especially Health and Social Services, or local neighbourhood renewal groups are identified as an indicator).

This literature review has identified some barriers to learning for boys and young men. In 'Every School a Good School' it is clear that it is a priority of DE to retain a clear focus on tackling the barriers to learning that many young people face. The Department is determined to close the gap in achievement that exists and tackling educational underachievement is undoubtedly the significant challenge that is highlighted in the document. The goal of DE is clearly stated here as maintaining *a clear focus on raising standards and on allowing every young person to reach his or her full potential*. The importance of developing pupils' emotional health and well-being are stressed and the building of pupils' resilience, e.g. through counselling, are important components in pursuit of this goal.



A key plank in ESaGS in relation to increasing engagement between schools and the parents, families and communities is the policy on 'Extended Schools: schools, families, communities - working together' which was published in 2006 to accompany the launch of the programme. Within this document there is a vision for Extended Schools (ES) policy and acts as a reference guide providing practical help to schools in delivering the aims of the programme.

At the time of writing the Extended Schools programme is in its sixth year of operation. In 2010 Department of Education refreshed the policy vision behind Extended Schools with the School Circular Extended Schools-Building on Good Practice.

From departmental literature we find that a good extended school would be one that works in *collaboration and partnership with other neighbouring schools and with a range of statutory, voluntary and community based organisations to offer services and activities which support and motivate children and young people to achieve their full potential.*

An example of these activities would be:

- \* Community access to school facilities; and
- \* Sign posting and access to non-formal education opportunities;

The Extended School policy encourages schools to benefit from interactions and to establish effective partnerships with other statutory services such as Health, the Youth sector and local voluntary and community organisations that also work closely with children and families.

Extended Schools policy clearly highlights that the future and success of a good extended schools programme depends on

- The importance of effective planning by schools;
- Mapping provision in relation to data and analysis of need; and
- Partnership with other provision in a community (e. g. youth service, health, neighbourhood renewal and engagement with the voluntary and community sector in delivery of services)

Throughout Extended Schools we find repeated emphasis and importance placed upon school staff working closely with the community and parents to find appropriate interventions to meeting the needs of those children in most need of support.

In June 2011 the newly appointed elected Minister for Education stated:

*"A top priority for me during my term in office will be the raising of standards and delivering improved outcomes for young people."*

He acknowledged youth work as an important part of the education system that provides the ideal environment to help young people who disengage from formal schooling to "re-engage, gain confidence and succeed in achieving their goals," and highlighted prioritising the needs of children over institutions and disparities such as boys' educational attainment remaining lower than girls.

In September 2012 the Minister for Education published the 'Priorities for Youth' document for consultation. This document outlines a set of priorities as part of a policy framework for youth work within education strategically aligned to the overall Department of Education's policy and vision for young people. Establishing 'Priorities for Youth' will provide a clear focus for the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) (to be established in 2013), which will have a statutory duty to deliver and support youth work in line with Departmental priorities.

Over the past number of years a suite of inter-connected policies have been implemented by the DE aimed at improving outcomes for young people such as, Every School a Good School; Count, Read, Succeed: a strategy to improve outcomes in literacy and numeracy; Transfer 2010; the Entitlement Framework; the Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion; the Early Years Strategy; Achieving Belfast and Derry; National Standards for Head teachers. Despite this, girls continue to outperform boys at every level from an early age. While this gender gap is a feature in many countries throughout the world, to date there is no agreed explanation for the attainment gap between boys and girls (Bradshaw, et al, 2010, PISA 2009).

### **3.8 Pedagogical Considerations for teaching Boys**

Many professionals and practitioners work with adolescent males. While some gain fulfilment from this work, others find adolescent males difficult to engage and are discouraged by outcomes (Geldard and Geldard, 2010). It is widely acknowledged that much of what young people learn occurs outside of formal education in school and colleges in what Jeffs and Smith (2010) term informal or non-formal education. The term became widely known in Britain in the 1940's when Brew (1947) questioned how educational opportunities could be developed and sustained beyond the classroom in places where people came together.

Alexander (2008) identifies two main approaches to teaching: 1) didactic, where the teacher controls the process; and 2) exploratory, where the learner is central to the process. Exploratory teaching encourages each young person to be 'an active agent in learning, with the classroom more like a workshop and the educator an experienced partner in learning' (Eaude, 2011: 14). Coburn (2010:35) argues that formal education privileges the educator as 'knowing and powerful' as they choose the content of programmes while learners have to learn content that may or may not be relevant to them.' In contrast non-formal educators, such as youth workers, adopt an exploratory relationship driven and holistic approach which puts the young person and their world and interests at the centre of the learning process. It is this emphasis which is fundamental to youth work pedagogy.

Keddie (2006: 99) argues that quality pedagogy is central to improving educational outcomes and in particular suggests that for disengaged boys there is a need to facilitate a broadening of their narrow constructions of gender identity through productive teaching informed by understandings of masculinity. This has important teacher training implications as it suggests that teaching boys should be underpinned by knowledge and understanding of the complexities and contradictions in the construction of masculinity and how boys become men.

### **3.9 Non formal education and formal education**

Education is about more than schools, and youth work provides a complementary service to formal education in Northern Ireland.

As well as 'Every School a Good School' and 'Extended Schools' policies there are a number of documents within Education that clearly identify the areas where formal and non-formal education interface in order to achieve agreed outcomes.

- Extended School (2006)
- NI Schools Curriculum (2007)
- Education (Other Skills) Order August 2007
- Department of Education – Teacher Education Partnership Handbook (2010 edition)
- Chief Inspector's Report 2008/10
- Department of Education Strategic Plan 2008/09
- Every School a Good School (April 2009)

The policy direction is clearly one of an *inclusive service* that the Chief Inspector refers to in his 2008-10 report.

*"In order to become more sustainable, those involved in education, work-based learning and youth provision need to work more effectively together to provide an inclusive service"*

Every Child Matters report (2007) posits:

*"A uni-dimensional focus on standards is not in itself able to impact sufficiently, but rather the school needs to set itself within the context of local strategies of neighbourhoods and communities or towns and to align their work with policies in housing, economic development, crime reduction and community development"*

Non-formal education, in the form of youth work, has a clear connection to formal education but operates primarily within local neighbourhoods and engages with young people both within and outside the school setting.

The Chief Inspector's Report (2008–2010) states that one of the strengths of youth sector provision was that young people participated in the management and development of their own programmes enabling young people from a variety of urban and rural backgrounds to develop self-confidence, leadership skills and effective team working (p 50). In particular the report states that many youth workers respond in effective and creative ways to meet the needs of marginalised young people. The report identifies that one of the growing challenges is for youth work to develop structures to better monitor and evaluate progression in young peoples' learning experiences and disseminate good practice.

The 2008-10 Chief Inspector report also illustrates harmony of agenda and focus for formal education and non-formal education: *"At the centre of all our efforts must be the raising of achievements and standards for children, young people and adult learners, at both personal and academic levels"*

It is estimated that a young person will spend around 16% of their time in a classroom over the year and as Dyson (2006) states the young person will learn 30% within the school and 70% outside of the school. This is further support, if needed, to DE policy that recognises that any improvements in pupil attainment come about through a collaborative effort requiring co-operation between parents, school, pupils and community and supporting services. Therefore the importance of having a complementary and effective youth service to connect with young people outside (as well as inside) the classroom is obvious. Hence, the imperative for education (formal and non-formal) is to start with, and respond to, the realities of individual young people. The active and sustained participation of young people in school and in their communities and public life in general is a key tool for the development of a more cohesive, inclusive and sharing community and a core value in youth work. Dyson argues that education is a principle determinant of life chances and must be central to tackling social exclusion and there is a vital role for education, and for those in the service of education, to work together with communities to overcome the barriers to attainment

According to Dyson (2006) it is reasonable to expect teachers who interface with children and young people on a daily basis, to shape their approaches in response to the realities of young peoples' lives. An understanding of the social and economic contexts of children and young people, families and communities and the role of other agencies within those contexts is an essential ingredient for any youth worker, teacher or anyone in the educational system. It is here where we look to policies like 'Every School A Good School' and 'Extended Schools' as key to encouraging families and communities to have expectations for children and young people and to support their school. It is

through this policy school leaders can extend their thinking beyond standards and institutional advantage in order to actively encourage and develop families and communities in support of new priorities and to be more willing to be part of local strategies and work alongside other educationalists within a broader network of provision. There is clearly an opportunity here to develop this collaborative working within the education family against the backdrop of the key policies.

### **3.10 Wider Social Environment**

This section of the literature review focuses on some of the wider socio-economic environment and issues that impact upon the lives and development of boys and young men.

#### **3.10.1 Exclusions**

There were 4240 pupils suspended across Key Stages 1-4 in primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland during 2010/11 (DE, 2011). Over three times as many were boys (3286) compared to girls (954). In 2010/11 there were a total of 38 expulsions – the majority of who were male and of post-primary age. The three most common reasons for expulsion identified by DE, (2011) were:

- Persistent infringement of school rules- which accounted for 23.68% of expulsions
- Disruptive behaviour in class (21.05%) and
- Substance abuse (18.42%)

The National Association of Schoolmasters Union and Women Teachers suggested that exclusions are linked to a rise in violence in schools, particularly violence directed at teachers, who defended the use of exclusion as a necessary tool to deal with the threat to teachers. There is concern however, that the use of suspensions or exclusions is becoming increasingly used as a means of control-although many teachers believe there isn't an effective alternative (Torney, 2003). A report in the Belfast Telegraph (Aug, 13<sup>th</sup> 2011) highlighted that while violent incidences in schools has fallen from 374 in 2006 to 262 in 2010, the PSNI was tasked to investigate five incidences of violent crime every week in schools during the previous year. This included the use of 55 weapons, with 20 knives, a gun and a sword. The report also revealed that over 1200 teachers reported being verbally abused by pupils or parents. The five teaching unions in Northern Ireland agreed an anti-violence statement to be issued to schools across NI during autumn 2011.

#### **3. 10.2 Unemployment**

Similar to the rest of the UK and Ireland, the decline of industry and other full-time traditional male jobs and an increase in the retail and service sectors are strongly reflected in Northern Ireland. Gray and Horgan (2009) state that 'While the number of manufacturing jobs in Northern Ireland fell by over 13,500 (13.7 %) in the pre-recession period between 2001 and 2006, the ten year period from 1996 saw a 30% increase in the number of jobs in the service sector. The result was that in 2007, four out of every five jobs (79%) in Northern Ireland were in the service sector. Just over one in ten jobs (12%) were in manufacturing and 6% in construction.'

The Labour Force Survey (2010) showed that from April to June 2010 the male unemployment rate in NI had risen 1.2% to 9% during the last ten years while the female rate fell by 1.6% to 3.8%. The proportion of male young claimants in NI is approximately 2.9 times that of females, which compares to a UK average of 2.2 males to every female (Bennett, 2010).

#### **3.10.3 NEETS (Not in Employment, Education and Training)**

Between 2007 and 2009 increases in youth unemployment rates in Northern Ireland was almost double the UK rate. The youth unemployment rate for Northern Ireland in 2011 was 18.1 per cent, falling from 19 per cent in 2010, which is lower than the equivalent UK rate of 20% (Department of

Enterprise, Trade and Investment, 2011). In part this can be attributed to the higher numbers of young people staying on at school or college; however Northern Ireland also has a significant number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETS).

Reports published by the Prince's Trust (2007, 2010) estimated that unemployment amongst young people aged 18-24, costs the UK economy up to £90m per week. It further estimated that cost in benefits for 18-24 year olds who are unemployed in Northern Ireland is £543,816 per week- around £28 million per year. The report claims that while the cost of educational underachievement is difficult to measure, depression caused by underachievement at school could cost the NHS between £11m and £28m a year.

### **3.10.4 Moral Panic**

Stanley Cohen, in his work, *Folk Devils and Moral Panic* (1987) first coined the term 'moral panic'. He defined the concept as a sporadic episode which occurs when the values and principles of a society may be under threat. Cohen describes its characteristics as 'a condition, episode, person or group of persons [who] become defined as a threat to societal values and interests.' [Cohen, 1987: 9]

While moral panic can occur for many reasons and is not gender specific, concerns about boys' underachievement in the 1990s was linked to a wider moral panic about boys and young men. Authors identified that panic about working class boys in particular translated to boys generally by the late 1990s (Foster, et al, 2009). These same authors argued that this was at least in part because of the move from an education system that aimed to promote social justice to Conservative notions of 'freedom of choice', with complex league table driven systems that brought to light the gender gap and in turn the moral panic about underachieving boys into the twenty first century.

### **3.10.5 Mental and Emotional Health**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2005) estimate that 1 in 20 young people experience developmental, emotional or behavioural problems and 1 in 8 young people has a mental disorder. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, (2005) found links between mental health and the social environment, with deprivation, poverty and low educational attainment associated with poor mental health. They also found that in Northern Ireland mental health needs are approximately 25% higher than the UK average.

The Bamford Review (2006) revealed that Gender has a significant impact upon risk and protective factors for mental health in Northern Ireland and the prevalence of mental health problems is greater amongst 11–16 year old boys (11%) than girls (8%). Recent increases in the number and rates of suicides since the mid-1990s are accounted for by younger people, particularly young males. In the majority of countries more males die by suicide than females (WHO, 2007).

Suicide has become the largest killer of young males in Northern Ireland (Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2006). Suicide rates have been rising markedly in Northern Ireland over the past decade. According to the Public Health Agency (PHA, 2010), after a period of relatively static figures in the latter half of the last century, between 1999 and 2008 rates of suicide in Northern Ireland increased by 64%. Most of the rise was attributable to young men in the 15 to 34 age group. A total 313 deaths in NI were registered as suicide in 2010-of these 240 were male and 73 female. A large proportion was concentrated in disadvantaged areas and, in particular, north and west Belfast. A report by The University of Manchester on suicide trends in Northern Ireland (2011) reveals that the rate of death by suicide from 1998-2008 in Northern Ireland was higher than in England and Wales but lower than in Scotland. Male suicides outnumbered female suicides by three to one with the number of death by suicide in the 15 – 24 year olds recorded as 23% for males and

4% for females. Gay and bisexual males, especially amongst adolescents, have higher rates of suicidal ideation, attempts and completion than heterosexual males (Flood, 2007).

### **3.10.6 Young men and Violence**

Harland's (2000) inner city Belfast study with adolescent males aged 14–16 showed how marginalised young men increasingly felt alienated, powerless and disconnected from mainstream society. These adolescent males were disengaged from school and pessimistic about the future. They were wary of other young men within their own community and school and fearful and suspicious of people from other communities. Fear of sectarian violence meant that few ventured outside of their own area. Paramilitary influence was a constant threat that resulted in these young men feeling vulnerable and confused regarding issues surrounding law and order. Despite these pressures and threats, these young men reported that they rarely spoke to adults about their experiences. They found it difficult to ask for emotional support and did not want to be 'shamed' amongst their peers by seeking help. They believed men showing vulnerability was a sign of weakness and that by withholding certain feelings and emotions they were expressing an important aspect of what it means to be a man-the need to be tough, often leading to them resorting to violence to sort out issues. Over a decade after Harland's study, evidence suggests that little has changed for marginalised young men in regard to their attitudes and experiences of everyday violence, conflict and safety (see, Lloyd, 2009; Harland and McCreedy, 2010; Harland, 2011). The complexities and reality of prolonged violence and fear of violence in Northern Ireland continue to be an integral and complex aspect of male identity formation (McAlister, Scraton & Haydon, 2009). Also concerning is the fact that dissident violence is reported to be at a very sophisticated level of expertise suggesting that former members of paramilitary groups may be actively assisting, recruiting or joining dissident paramilitary organisations (McAleese, 2009).

Reilly et al (2004), after providing statistics showing that young men (aged 17-24) were over-represented amongst the victims of the 'Troubles', make the point that 'it would be naive to suggest that all of these male victims were bystanders to the conflict, thus reflecting the difficulty of distinguishing victim from perpetrator in situations of armed conflict.' Reilly et al (2004) go on to suggest that thrill seeking, lack of parental supervision, aggressive male role models, and the excitement attached to inter-community conflict all contribute to young men's active involvement in violence, both as victims and perpetrators. Reilly also makes the point that social class, age, religion and geography all play a part as well as gender.

### **3.11 Summary**

This journey through literature has highlighted a number of points.

- The link between poverty and educational achievement is well established
- Children and adolescents thrive when they experience reliable, stable and loving relationships with whomever it is that looks after them
- The key factors that contribute to successful primary to secondary post primary transitions are:
  - Supportive parents
  - Having friends who are making the same transition
  - Primary schools that prepare children in advance of the transition

When we look for evidence as to *why boys underachieve* we are offered a range of theories:

- Testing and assessment not matching boys styles of writing or preferred methods of being assessed

- An anti-school culture and inclination toward rejecting authority is more prevalent amongst boys than girls
- Lack of male teachers in schools to act as potential role models
- Gender stereotyping by teachers
- Lack of a gender specific approach to tackling underachievement

We are offered suggestions as to *how underachievement with boys can be tackled* with quality pedagogy being central to improving educational outcomes:

- The use of praise and rewards for achievement to incentivise boys
- Giving boys a voice and valuing their opinions
- A school ethos that expects boys to achieve and the minimising of gender stereotyping (an asset-based approach)
- Raising aspirations of boys and parents and promoting the value of education
- Targeted support in the school (with evidence that targeted initiatives may be more successful than universal approaches)
- For disengaged boys there is a need to facilitate a broadening of a potential narrow construction of gender identity
- For those working with boys in a school environment there is a need to better understand the internal pressures experienced by adolescent males in constructing their masculine identities and the link between this and their attitudes to school and learning
- Teachers should shape their approaches in response to the realities of boys' lives

Educational Policy in Northern Ireland aims to make a significant contribution to narrowing the gaps in educational attainment levels and overcoming barriers to learning. The improvement policy is centred on six areas:

- Effective Leadership and ethos of aspiration and high achievement
- High quality teaching and learning
- Tackling the barriers that many young people face
- Embedding a culture of self-evaluation and self-assessment and of using performance and other information to effect improvement
- Focus clearly on support to help schools improve
- Increase engagement between schools, parents, families and local communities

## SECTION 4: FINDINGS FROM QUANTITATIVE DATA

### 4.0 Overview

This section of the report presents the findings from the six self-completion quantitative questionnaires. These questionnaires were:

- About me questionnaire
- The KIDSCREEN Quality of Life questionnaire for adolescents
- The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to assess emotional and behavioural issues
- Schools Questionnaire enquiring about school experiences, preferences, post-school aspirations
- The Being a Man questionnaire exploring perceptions of ‘masculinity and what it means to be a man’
- The Violence Questionnaire seeking to understand how adolescent males conceptualise violence and their personal experience of violence, being in trouble and bullying

To assist with analysis and cross tabulation, two ways of describing boys were identified. While these groups are not mutually exclusive, the classifications assist in exploration of relationships between statistical data from the six questionnaires.

- 1) *Academic*: high or low levels of academic motivation/preference according to liking for Maths, English and Science, with the median used as a cut-off point. Those below or equal to the median are deemed as low in academic focus while those above the median being deemed as being high in academic focus i.e. high in liking for Maths, English and Science.
- 2) *Misbehaviour*: higher or lower levels of self-reported conduct problems. Those above the median are deemed to have a greater level (more) misbehaviour while those below or equal to the median are deemed as having a lower level (less) misbehaviour.

### 4.1 About Me questionnaire

#### 4.1.1 Religious distribution

The sample of between 340-378 boys consisted of two major religious groups, Catholic 54.7% and Protestant 35.3% with 10% reporting ‘other.’

#### 4.1.2 Who brings me up?

The majority of participants (77.4%) were brought up by both their mum and dad. 15.9% of boys were brought up by their mums and 3.2% by their fathers.

#### 4.1.3 Who boys are closest to

Table 3 below shows that across all five years these boys consistently self-reported they were closer to their mother than their father. In Year 12 almost half (41.8%) reported being closest to their mothers—compared to 33.7% in Year 8. 24.7% reported being closest to their dads in Year 12 compared to 18.6% in Year 8, although this fell slightly from 26.4% in Year 11.



**Table 3. Change in self-reported choice of closest parent across 5 years**

Closest to:-	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
Mother	33.7%	36.1%	34.6%	42.9%	41.8%
Father	18.6%	21.1%	19.8%	26.4%	24.7%
Mother and father	37.4%	29.8%	25.9%	15.6%	17.9%

#### **4.1.4 Relationships with fathers and mothers**

On examination of the relationship between closeness to father there were noticeable differences in boys reporting low academic motivation/preference in regard to misbehaviour levels. That is, a greater proportion of boys who reported they were not closest to their father misbehaved (55.0%). However, boys with high academic motivation/preference reporting they were closest to their father also had high levels of misbehaviour (54.5%). This suggests that closeness to father does not necessarily guarantee lower misbehaviour levels for boys in this sample. The decrease in closeness to mother and father across the five years from 37.4% in Year 8 to 17.9% in Year 12 and the increase from Year 8 to Year 12 in closeness to mother (8.1%) or father (6.1%) suggests that as adolescent boys get older being closest to both parents shifts to being close to one parent only, typically their mother.

#### **4.1.5 Mealtimes**

Adolescent mental and physical health and delinquent behaviour are closely linked to a number of factors such as family communications, parenting styles, socio-economic status and social context. Recent studies in adolescent development and well-being have examined the effect of mealtime quality and quantity on academic performance. Family meal times have also been positively correlated to significantly lower rates of high-risk behaviours such as substance abuse, depression, violence, eating problems as well as better ability to resist negative peer pressure, higher self-esteem, having a sense of purpose, and a positive outlook. Fulkerson et al (2006) suggest that family mealtimes are also seen as a place for young people to learn social skills and develop self-esteem.

Boys were asked ‘on an average week, how many times do all the people in your family who you live with, eat dinner together?’ The largest grouping across all the years was boys who had mealtimes with their family every day, although this declined across the years from close to half in Year 8 (40.2%) to less than a quarter (21.5%) by Year 12.

**Table 4. Average weekly meals with family across 5 years**

Average weekly dinners with family:-	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
0	4.7%	4.7%	6.6%	10.1%	7.7%
1	4.7%	6.8%	8.5%	6.7%	4.7%
2	6.1%	7.4%	8.5%	6.4%	9.7%
3	10.1%	9.2%	5.6%	10.9%	15.6%
4	9.8%	8.9%	13.3%	12.0%	11.5%
5	10.8%	17.2%	20.4%	19.2%	17.9%
6	12.2%	14.2%	11.9%	10.9%	11.5%
7	40.2%	31.7%	25.2%	23.9%	21.5%

#### **4.1.6 Family mealtimes and academic motivation/preference and misbehaviour**

A significant proportion of boys who reported more misbehaviour indicated that they had less than three family meals per week (66.7%); similarly, a significant proportion of boys who reported low academic motivation/preference, indicated that they had less than 3 family meals per week (69.2%).

## 4.2 Quality of Life questionnaire (KIDSCREEN)

### 4.2.1 Introduction

The KIDSCREEN Quality of Life instrument (Ravens-Sieberer et al, 2007) was developed to provide a European-specific measure of perceived health-related quality of life in child and adolescent populations aged from 8 to 18 years. KIDSCREEN is child-centric, and was designed to reflect the child's, rather than an adult point of view. Quality of Life can be defined as a subjective, personal satisfaction or happiness with physical, psychological and social well-being aspects of everyday life and provides results that can be compared with UK averages. The 5 dimensions measured in this 27-item version were physical well-being, psychological well-being, autonomy, social and peer support, and school environment.

**Table 5. Mean scores across the time points for quality of life factors**

Quality of life	(Year 8)	(Year 9)	(Year 10)	(Year 11)	(Year 12)	UK Norm
Physical well-being	48.58	47.61	51.09	48.77	49.30	50.41
Psychological well-being	51.45	50.67	46.94	51.81	52.22	48.89
Autonomy	53.02	51.27	50.38	51.77	51.21	49.65
Social support and peers	53.97	50.48	52.03	50.24	51.21	49.51
School environment	48.94	47.60	46.57	45.63	46.01	48.84

### 4.2.2 Physical well-being

This subscale measures levels of physical activity, energy and fitness. Table 5 shows that across the five years of the study physical well-being was generally below the UK average, apart from Year 10. All-boys schools had the highest levels of physical well-being throughout the study. Boys with low academic motivation/preference and higher levels of misbehaviour had the lowest levels of physical well-being while boys with high academic motivation/preference and lower levels of misbehaviour had the highest physical well-being. This suggests that physical activity may have a positive influence on boys in regard to their education and behaviour and implies that attention should be given to the amount of time available for physical activity for boys either within school, or after school activities.

### 4.2.3 Psychological well-being

This subscale examines levels of psychological wellbeing including positive emotions and satisfaction with life as well as feelings of loneliness and low self-esteem. Table 5 shows a significant reduction in self-reported levels of psychological well-being in Year 10 to below the UK norm followed by a significant rise above the UK norm at Year 11 and 12.

The drop in levels of psychological well-being in Year 10 (year of GCSE selection) and the subsequent increase in Years 11 and 12 (years of preparing and sitting GCSE's) suggests that thinking about GCSE's in Year 10 had a significant impact on these boys' psychological well-being and influenced negatively the extent to which they viewed life. The fact that boys' psychological well-being increased again in Years 11 and 12 suggests that boys were supported and able to successfully overcome negative emotions and display resilience.

Boys with low levels of self-reported misbehaviour had the highest psychological well-being, while those boys reporting high misbehaviour levels had the lowest levels of psychological well-being. This would appear to indicate a link between behaviour and overall psychological well-being.

#### **4.2.4 Autonomy**

Autonomy examines the quality of interaction between an adolescent and parent/carer as well as how much they feel loved and supported by their family and the extent to which they feel financial resources restrict their life style. Autonomy is seen as a developmental issue for creating an adolescent's individual identity. It also refers to an adolescent's freedom of choice, self-sufficiency and independence and the extent to which they shape their own life and opportunities to participate in social and leisure activities.

Autonomy self-reported levels in this sample were consistently above the UK norm across all 5 years (see table 5). This suggests that boys felt positive about relationships with parents, their ability to make choices and their financial resources. The highest autonomy levels occurred with boys with lower levels of misbehaviour and higher levels academic motivation/preference. Notably however, boys from grammar schools reported less autonomy than non-grammar schools suggesting they may be more restricted in their freedom and life choices and remain more dependent upon parents during post-primary school (see table 6 below). It could be hypothesised therefore that boys in grammar schools take longer to become independent as they are more dependent on significant adults in order to realise their academic aspirations, whereas pupils from non-grammar schools may learn greater independence, and evidence more resilience at a younger age. However it could also be hypothesised that learning independence is a result of these boys not receiving the support they require from parents and other significant adults.

**Table 6 Autonomy levels split across the years according to school attended**

	Autonomy and Parents				
	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
Grammar	50.94	48.62	49.85	49.02	47.57
Non-grammar	53.26	53.39	51.77	52.01	52.76
All-boys	54.93	51.52	52.78	49.85	50.66
Co-educational	51.81	52.15	50.79	51.93	51.37

#### **4.2.5 Social support and peers**

This subscale examines the nature of social relationships and feelings of rejection or acceptance by peers as well as their perceived levels of support. Boys reported generally higher levels of social and peer support compared to the UK norm indicating these boys perceived themselves as having high levels of support from peers and others. Boys with higher levels of academic motivation/ preference and lower levels of misbehaviour reported the highest levels of social support and acceptance by their peers. Table 7 below shows boys from grammar schools had higher levels of support in Year 8 than non-grammar school boys. However this difference reduced significantly when measured across the five years and turned around completely by Year 12 in that boys from non-grammar schools perceived themselves as having more support and better peer relationships than grammar school boys. While levels of social support also dropped across the years for boys from non-grammar schools, the difference between school types may be that boys from grammar schools increasingly place more emphasis on their studies rather than on peer relationships and support. While certain boys may feel some form of rejection by their peers and others at certain times during early to mid-adolescence, their overall sense of social relationships and peer support was consistently higher than the UK average (see table 5).

**Table 7. Social support and peers levels split across the years according to school attended**

	Social Support and Peers				
	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
Grammar	55.21	48.07	51.22	49.92	48.31
Non-grammar	53.68	52.01	52.03	49.45	50.96

#### **4.2.6 School environment**

This subscale explores boys' perceptions of their cognitive capacity, learning, levels of concentration and feelings about being at school. Poor perceptions from boys of school environment remained consistent across the 5 years with only the first time point (Year 8) being above the UK norm (see table 5 above). There was a direct correlation between a perceived 'positive' school environment and behaviour and academic motivation/preference. That is, those boys reporting higher levels of academic motivation/preference and lower levels of misbehaviour had the highest levels of concentration and cognitive capacity and felt good about being in school. Findings from focus groups further revealed a desire amongst boys for improvements in school buildings and classrooms across all types of schools sampled. While this cannot be directly linked to academic underachievement, there is undoubtedly a need for schools to consider the comfort, presentation, design and pleasantness of the school building and classroom environment.

## 4.3 Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

### 4.3.1 Introduction

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), (Goodman, Meltzer & Bailey, 1998) is a self-report behavioural screening questionnaire suitable for use with 11 to 16 year olds. The SDQ has 25 items that are scored on a 3-point scale and addresses 5 subscales of Emotional Symptoms, Conduct Problems, Hyperactivity, Peer Problems and Pro-social Behaviour within the last six months. Data measures boys scoring within the 'normal', 'borderline' and 'abnormal' categories according to the scoring procedure for the questionnaire and is compared to the UK norm.

Those boys in 'normal' categories equates with what most boys of that age in the UK are reporting in respect to these aspects. Boys in the 'borderline' and especially the 'abnormal' categories suggests boys' behaviour as being outside of UK norms.

### 4.3.2 Comparison of the strengths and difficulties scores across years

**Table 8. SDQ dimension change across time points compared to UK norms**

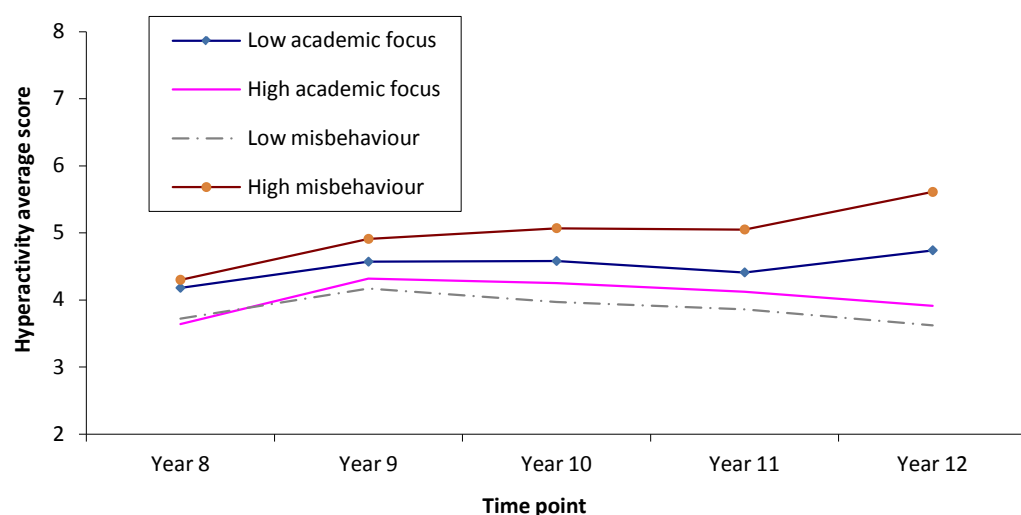
		Percentage of current sample					UK Norm Percentage
		Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	
Emotional	Normal	92.5	90.7	90.8	94.3	93.4	91.0
	Borderline	3.8	4.8	4.0	4.1	3.9	5.7
	<b>Abnormal</b>	3.7	4.5	2.1	1.6	2.7	3.2
Conduct	Normal	60.7	58.4	60.4	71.5	76.5	74.6
	Borderline	12.2	16.2	14.8	11.1	9.3	11.9
	<b>Abnormal</b>	27.1	25.4	23.2	17.4	14.2	13.5
Hyperactivity	Normal	70.5	65.6	63.9	67.7	68.2	77.0
	Borderline	14.9	14.8	13.7	13.5	13.0	10.3
	<b>Abnormal</b>	14.6	22.7	20.3	18.8	18.8	12.6
Peer Relations	Normal	85.8	82.0	85.2	87.0	84.4	89.2
	Borderline	10.5	12.6	9.0	9.2	11.7	9.3
	<b>Abnormal</b>	3.7	5.4	2.9	3.8	3.9	1.5
Pro-social	Normal	78.0	67.9	60.9	64.7	70.4	86.1
	Borderline	12.5	17.3	20.8	19.1	16.5	11.0
	<b>Abnormal</b>	9.5	14.9	16.2	16.2	13.2	2.8

Table 8 shows that in relation to the 'Emotional' and 'Peer Relations' dimensions of the SDQ, the percentage of boys in the 'normal', 'borderline' and 'abnormal' remained relatively similar to the UK average. In contrast, a noticeably higher percentage of boys in the sample reported 'abnormal' levels of 'Conduct' problems compared to the UK average, particularly in Years 8 through to 10. In Years 11 and 12 the 'Conduct' dimension more closely reflected the UK norm. The higher levels of abnormal conduct during Years 8-10 suggest that boys at this age may need a different and more creative approach to engage them in school than in years 11-12. It may be that conduct levels in Years 10-12 are reduced because of boys naturally maturing, or perhaps they are becoming more focussed due to their perceived importance of GCSE's. If the latter is true, this suggests that adolescent boys benefit from approaches that have a clear and specific focus and are deemed important to their education and future. Either way it is noteworthy that during early adolescence certain boys in this study presented extremely high levels of abnormal conduct in comparison to UK averages.

There was a noticeably higher percentage of boys with ‘abnormal’ levels of ‘Hyperactivity’ compared to the UK norm across Years 9 to 12. This suggests that certain boys in this study were displaying types of behaviour that would have a significant and perhaps negative effect upon their school experience and the value they place on education. Conversely, it could be that school does not stimulate these boys, or it is perceived by them as irrelevant, or unconnected to their lives, or that they cannot cope with the educational demands placed upon them. While hyperactivity levels did reduce during Years 11-12, they still remained much higher than UK averages. The higher abnormal levels in relation to conduct and hyperactivity suggest that teachers in Northern Ireland have to deal with higher levels of misbehaviour than teachers in the UK which has implications for teacher training.

Hyperactivity levels significantly increased and diverged more across the time-points according to academic motivation/preference and misbehaviour levels (See Table 9). Throughout the five years those boys with high misbehaviour levels had the highest levels of hyperactivity, which peaked at Year 12 while those with low misbehaviour levels were the least hyperactive across time points. In addition, those with lower academic motivation/preference had the second highest levels of hyperactivity across all the time points.

**Table 9. Hyperactivity across the time-points according to academic motivation and levels of misbehaviour**



Across all the years, there were a higher percentage of boys with ‘borderline’ or ‘abnormal’ reported levels of ‘Pro-social’ behaviour compared to the UK norms. Higher pro-social levels are generally seen as positive as they indicate kindness to others and helpfulness, amongst other positive behaviours. However, it can also be seen as a potentially negative finding as those boys with abnormally high levels of pro-social behaviour may be vulnerable to others with less than pure motives. The trends in higher levels of pro-social behaviour at Year 8 suggest it is during early adolescence around the ages of 11-12 that boys may be most vulnerable to others. There was a significant range of pro-social behaviour levels in Year 8 according to academic motivation/preference and misbehaviour levels. Boys with high levels of misbehaviour had the lowest pro-social behaviour levels while those with low misbehaviour levels had the highest pro-social behaviour levels.

## 4.4 School experiences questionnaire

### 4.4.1 Feelings about the transition from primary to post-primary school.

In Year 8 boys were asked specific questions about how they felt about the transition from primary to post-primary school. Boys were asked to reflect upon four different time points - when they knew they were coming to this particular school, when they left primary school, when they started post-primary school and how they now felt at the end of the first year about being at the school. In general, participants reported moving from feeling OK, happy or excited when they knew they were coming to this school, to feeling sad or OK when leaving primary school.

1. *When you were at primary school, how do you remember feeling when you knew you were coming to this school?*
  - Over 77% reported feeling OK or better about the school. 12.8% reported feeling worried, 7.7% said they were afraid or angry, and 4.4% said they were sad.
2. *How did you feel when you left primary school?*
  - 76% reported feeling OK or better about leaving primary school. 22% reported feeling sad and 1.4% said they felt worried.
3. *How did you feel when you first started this school?*
  - 84% reported feeling OK or better about starting their post-primary school. 11% said they were worried and 4.4% afraid.
4. *How do you feel about being at this school at the end of Year 8.*
  - 80% reported feeling OK or better about being at their school now. No participant reported feeling afraid, 2.1% felt sad and 5.1% felt angry.

In summary, the majority of boys made the transition from primary to post-primary successfully (averaging 80% feeling OK or better), although the trends in hyperactivity (see table 8) in Year 8 and reported feelings of worry, sadness and anger shown above are worth noting as potential areas for further investigation.

### 4.4.2 School related preferences

Each year boys were asked to report on a range of subject and school related experiences and post-school aspirations (see appendix 4).

### 4.4.3 Comparison of various school experiences across years

**Table 10. Participant average feelings toward academic experiences across 5 years**

Liking towards:	Time 1 (Year 8)	Time 2 (Year 9)	Time 3 (Year 10)	Time 4 (Year 11)	Time 5 (Year 12)
IT and computing	3.65	3.74	3.47	3.20	3.04
English	2.59	3.11	3.17	2.99	2.99
Languages	2.87	2.23	2.63	2.49	2.68
Maths	3.04	3.16	3.33	3.14	3.35
Science	3.54	3.11	3.58	3.35	3.58
Sports	4.65	4.55	4.36	4.23	4.10
Teachers	3.16	2.86	3.08	3.17	3.40
After school activities	3.90	3.59	3.64	3.37	3.29
Breaks and lunchtimes	4.21	4.12	4.01	4.17	4.03
Meeting Friends	4.67	4.53	4.58	4.56	4.63

Table 10 shows how boys rated their school experiences on a scale of 1 to 5, the higher score indicating the greater liking. When asked what school related experiences boys liked best, the top three answers across the years were 'meeting up with friends', 'playing sports' and 'break and lunchtimes,' all of which are non-direct academic subjects. 'Liking for meeting friends' remained consistently high across the years, reinforcing qualitative data that these boys perceived school as much about personal and social development as academic learning and enjoyed the social and physical opportunities that being in school offers. While 'Liking for sports' was high it did lessen as the boys progressed through the years, which may reflect the increasing focus on forthcoming GCSE examinations in later years. Liking for after school activities steadily declined but remained at a moderately high level which suggests that despite academic pressures across the five years boys consistently engaged positively with afterschool activities.

In relation to core subject areas of English, Maths and Science, the liking for these subjects increased across the sample from Year 8 to Year 12 suggesting that doing well in these core subjects was perceived as important by boys in determining their future life opportunities and choices.

IT and computing also rated consistently high across the years, suggesting that boys will engage more actively with subjects that involve components of IT and therefore there is much potential for making connections to, and stimulating interest in, other subjects where IT and computing is used.

'Languages' was the least liked academic experience across the 5 years of the study, with the lowest overall liking score in year 9.

#### ***4.4.4 Comparison of feelings towards teachers***

Teachers were generally quite well liked and this did increase from Year 8 to Year 12 apart from a dip in Year 9. Those boys with low misbehaviour levels had a significantly greater liking for teachers as did boys with high academic motivation/preference. In contrast, those boys with low academic motivation/preference had significantly less liking for teachers, linking relationships with teachers strongly to boys' behaviour. The increase in liking for teachers in Years 11 and 12 suggests that liking for teachers may be linked to the fact that these boys believed they were receiving useful support and encouragement from teachers during GCSE's. The nature and importance of relationships with teachers was a key finding in focus groups and will be discussed further in that section of this report.

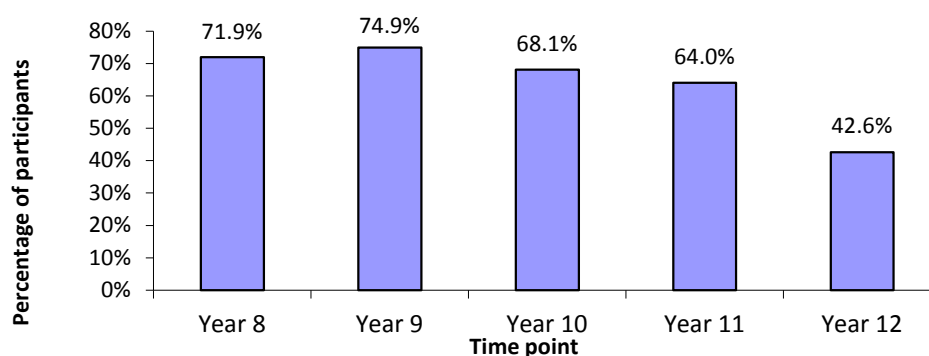
#### ***4.4.5 Feelings about being in School***

Boys were asked to rate their feelings about school, their behaviour at school, and self-reported misbehaviour levels, and whom they confided in when in trouble. Across the years the vast majority of boys felt either 'OK' (50.3%) or 'Happy' (27.2%) about attending their current school. This reveals that 77.5% of the overall sample felt neutral or positive about their experience at school. A significant minority (16.1%) felt 'angry, worried, sad or afraid' in regards to their current school with a further 7.4% reporting they 'didn't feel anything' towards attending their school.

#### ***4.4.6 Misbehaviour at school***

Boys were asked to interpret and assess their own behaviour at school. When examining self-reported misbehaviour across the five years, findings revealed a significant reduction in misbehaviour levels amongst boys (see table 11 below). The 42.6% of boys who said they had been in trouble in Year 12 was noticeably lower than previous years reflecting a continued downward trend in reported levels of being in trouble across years from 74.9% in Year 9. This trend suggests that as adolescent boys mature they are less likely to get into trouble in school. Years 11 and 12 have the lowest levels of misbehaviour further suggesting that boys preparing for GCSE's are less likely to misbehave. However this may also be because boys mature naturally during mid-adolescence and are therefore less likely to display types of behaviour that will get them into trouble at school.



**Table 11. Levels of misbehaviour across the 5 years**

There was noticeably less misbehaviour in grammar schools (10%) compared to non-grammar schools in Years 10-12 which may again suggest the importance placed on GCSE's by grammar school boys in comparison to non-grammar school boys during these years.

There were no significant differences between boys from all-boys and co-educational schools across time points in relation to misbehaviour. However, boys from all-boys schools had noticeably higher prevalence in misbehaviour levels in Year 10, during Key Stage Three.

#### **4.4.7 Who boys confided in when they were in trouble**

Boys were asked who they confided in when they got into trouble at school and could select one or more answers (see table 12). Across the five years the most commonly cited choices were friends, and one or both parents. While the number of boys confiding in their mother and father increased across the years, the most significant increase was a shift towards confiding in a friend which almost doubled across the years. This suggests that boys in post-primary school develop a different and more intimate relationship with friends than when they were in primary school. By the time boys reached Year 11, friends had become the most likely individuals they would confide in when they were in trouble. This does not mean that boys confide less in their mother or father or both parents, just that they are more likely to share personal issues with others as well as parents. As this question focused on whom boys confided in when in trouble, responses may have been different if boys were discussing a different issue.

**Table 12. Individuals who boys confided in when in trouble across 5 years**

Confided in:-	Time 1 (Year 8)	Time 2 (Year 9)	Time 3 (Year 10)	Time 4 (Year 11)	Time 5 (Year 12)
Friend	16.3%	19.5%	23.7%	31.6%	31.3%
Mother	22.4%	28.9%	29.6%	28.9%	28.2%
Father	13.9%	15.9%	13.2%	12.9%	18.9%
Parents	15.9%	24.4%	16.4%	13.7%	11.9%
Teacher	5.4%	2.9%	2.1%	0.8%	1.3%
Other family member	6.4%	6.1%	10.9%	8.2%	5.3%
Professional	0.7%	1.2%	0.7%	3.1%	1.8%

Notably there was a significant decrease in the number of boys confiding in their teacher across the years and very few boys who spoke to a professional. This is perhaps understandable as the focus of the question was boys getting into trouble in school and therefore participants may have been reluctant to discuss this with a teacher. However because boys liking for teachers did increase across the years, it would appear that as boys mature they become more selective about what they discuss with teachers and the types of support they expect from different individuals.

#### 4.4.8 How boys felt about being in trouble

Table 13 reveals how boys felt about being in trouble across the five years of post-primary school. Once again boys could indicate more than one answer. Throughout the study boys' most frequent response was 'I didn't care', an increase of almost 25 percentage points culminating in over half the sample indicating this choice in the final time point in Year 12 (table 13). The second most frequent choice, which remained consistent across time points, was 'Wanted to get it sorted'. Notably, these most frequent choices are complete opposites with one avoiding the trouble-related issues, 'I didn't care', while the other suggests that the boys wanted to tackle the problems directly.

**Table 13. Feeling about being in trouble across 5 years**

Feeling about being in trouble:-	Time 1 (Year 8)	Time 2 (Year 9)	Time 3 (Year 10)	Time 4 (Year 11)	Time 5 (Year 12)
I didn't care	30.8%	43.0%	39.6%	34.4%	54.4%
I felt sad	10.2%	19.0%	9.8%	6.3%	7.1%
Angry with myself	21.7%	29.8%	20.8%	13.2%	18.3%
No-one to talk to	5.1%	9.7%	5.0%	4.0%	5.9%
I felt stupid	15.9%	31.8%	22.7%	15.1%	24.9%
I felt sorry	12.9%	2.4%	12.9%	20.3%	12.4%
I felt scared	9.5%	16.3%	5.3%	4.0%	2.4%
Wanted to get it sorted	24.7%	32.2%	25.3%	20.6%	37.9%
I felt ashamed	11.5%	18.3%	8.4%	6.9%	7.7%
Angry with someone	10.8%	23.6%	20.1%	16.4%	21.9%
I felt good	5.4%	8.9%	4.5%	2.4%	3.6%

The fact that so many boys have been in trouble, particularly during formative years in post-primary school, and the wide range of responses to this subject, would suggest that interventions to help boys process and reflect upon misbehaviour and its consequences would be beneficial to boys and schools. Addressing the consequences of misbehaviour could begin in Year 8 and be reinforced during subsequent years. This would encourage boys to question and reflect upon certain types of behaviour and help them better appreciate the need to talk to someone when they need support. This process may also enable boys to develop empathy towards others and explore practical and restorative ways to resolve conflict.

#### 4.5 Post School Aspirations

##### 4.5.1 Choices after Year 12

Boys were asked what they would do immediately after Year 12 and could select as many or as few options as they wanted therefore the tables below do not add up to 100%. Over half of participants indicated that they intend to further their education by studying 'A levels', while 'Do a course at a Further Education College' was the second most popular option (22.9%). This reflects a positive attitude from most boys in the sample to educational choices after fifth year. Less popular was to 'Look for a job' and 'get a trade', although over a quarter of the sample indicated that these options were a possibility for them after leaving school. It should be noted that there were fewer options chosen by boys in Year 12 suggesting that some boys may have had a firmer idea of their future aspirations. The 50% reduction in those choosing 'sign on the dole' across the years suggests that their future plans were more positive and assured, or taken more seriously, than in Year 8.

**Table 14. Comparison of choices after Year 12 across 5 years**

Choices after Year 12:	Time 1 (Year 8)	Time 2 (Year 9)	Time 3 (Year 10)	Time 4 (Year 11)	Time 5 (Year 12)
A Levels	46.4%	52.4%	60.4%	57.1%	53.9%
Further Education College	22.7%	22.3%	20.3%	18.0%	22.9%
Look for a job	49.8%	41.0%	36.4%	34.4%	17.4%
Get a trade as a plumber, joiner etc.	35.9%	25.4%	18.7%	17.7%	11.6%
Sign on the dole	5.1%	3.8%	5.0%	5.0%	2.5%

Examining after Year 12 choices across all time points there is a noticeable peak in 'A levels' popularity in Year 10, although this dropped by 6.5 percentage points in Year 12 (Table 14). After adding the number of boys also aspiring to go on to college, a total of 76.8% of boys in Year 12 indicated that they desired to stay in some form of education beyond post-primary school.

From the findings it could also be anticipated that the 53.9% of the sample who selected doing 'A Levels' may also aspire to go to university. However from Year 10 to Year 12 the number of pupils intending to do 'A Levels' declines by 6.5 percentage points suggesting that after key stage three exams these boys may no longer desire to go to university. This 'switch' appears to occur while boys are actually doing their GCSE's. This may suggest three things. Firstly, these boys have become less confident in their academic ability and therefore less ambitious in their academic pursuits. Secondly, they have developed a more realistic understanding of their academic abilities and thirdly, they have a better understanding of their options for pursuing their career paths.

There were also striking declines in popularity for 'Look for a job' and 'Get a trade as a plumber, joiner etc.' as after Year 12 choices across the years. For example, 'Looking for a job' fell dramatically from 49.8% in Year 8 to 17.4% in Year 12. This suggests that there remains a positive attitude towards the importance of continuing in education for the majority of boys, and their educational aspirations have increased. This may suggest several things. Firstly, as these boys mature getting a job after school may become less important to them than furthering their education. Secondly, as boys get older they may increasingly believe that it will be difficult for them to get a job, particularly during a recession, and therefore they delay this choice in favour of staying in education. Thirdly, boys may not be clear about the type of work they wish to do and therefore delay this option in favour of staying on in school. The main issue would appear to be that teachers and others are aware of the complexity for boys in making crucial choices that will shape their futures.

#### **4.5.2 Choices after Year 12 compared across school types**

Significant proportional differences occurred between boys from grammar and non-grammar schools in relation to the responses to 'A levels' and 'Do a course at a Further Education College' (see Table 15). Significantly more grammar students (82.8%) indicated that they would continue their education by taking 'A Levels' than non-grammar schools (53.9%). In contrast, a significantly greater proportion of boys from non-grammar schools indicated that they would 'Do a course at a Further Education College' (31%) compared to (15.2%) of grammar school boys.

**Table 15. Year 12 comparison of after Year 12 choices according to Grammar and Non-grammar schools**

	Grammar	Non-grammar
A levels	82.8%	53.9%
Do a course at a Further Education College	15.2%	31.0%
Look for a job	16.2%	21.6%
Get a trade as a plumber, joiner etc.	9.1%	15.1%
Sign on the dole	5.1%	2.0%

Significant proportional differences also occurred between boys from all-boys and co-educational

schools in relation to the responses to 'A levels' and 'Look for a job.' Significantly more co-educational school boys (66.7%) indicated that they would continue their education by taking 'A Levels' in comparison to (55.7%) of boys from all-boys schools (see table 16). In contrast, a significantly greater proportion of boys from all-boys schools (25.7%) indicated that they would 'Look for a job' compared to (16.2%) of boys from co-educational schools. While more research is needed into the life choices of boys beyond Year 12, findings tentatively indicate that in an all boys environment, getting a job is perceived as more important for boys than boys in a mixed gender environment.

**Table 16 Comparison of after Year 12 choices according to All-boys and Co-educational schools**

	All boys	Co-educational
A levels	55.7%	66.7%
Do a course at a Further Education College	29.3%	24.5%
Look for a job	25.7%	16.2%
Get a trade as a plumber, joiner etc.	10.0%	15.7%
Sign on the dole	0.7%	4.4%

**Table 17. Comparison of top career choices across 5 years**

Career choice:	(Year 8)	(Year 9)	(Year 10)	(Year 11)	(Year 12)
Professional	29.4	24.0	30.9	35.2	44.7
Trade	29.4	27.5	23.4	21.0	16.5
Sport	21.6	19.1	14.8	12.0	7.1
Technology	3.9	4.6	10.1	12.0	11.8
Emergency service/ Forces	4.9	4.3	9.2	6.0	5.9
Performing Arts	5.9	3.2	5.6	4.2	5.3
Business	2.9	5.5	3.0	5.4	7.1
Artist/ Creative	2.0	2.6	3.0	4.2	1.8

On examination of the top ranking career choices across all time points there were noticeable increases in popularity of professional and technology as career choices (see table 17). In contrast there were noticeable declines in popularity of trade and sporting careers. Despite this drop in popularity, trade was still more popular than technology as a future career choice. This suggests a greater level of practicality in these boys' future career choices as they got older, with a perception that being a professional was the preferable career choice for many boys. Although still a relatively unpopular choice, there was still a noticeable increase in interest in business as a future career. However, this does indicate that business is still a relatively unattractive choice for most of the boys in this sample.

Overall the findings reveal a lowering of future expectations amongst certain boys over the 5 year timeline and an increase in ambivalence in career choices. This is another area where adolescent boys may need both practical and emotional support in order to pursue aspirations, particularly if these are not to be realised academically. As will be seen in data from the focus groups, those boys who perceived they would not do well in GCSE's believed they were not given any realistic alternative career pathways to pursue, making them feel unprepared and anxious about the future.

## 4.6 Becoming a man questionnaire

Boys' masculine perceptions were tracked during each of the five years of the study to identify attitudinal change and pressures they may experience during the transition from boy to man. Twenty questions were asked using a Likert Scale rated on a range of 0 for strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree (see appendix 5). From these twenty questions a three factor solution was developed and labelled:

- Hegemony (stereotypical perceptions of masculinity representing competitiveness, aggressiveness, wealth, power, dominance and sports)
- Duty (men being responsible, having moral and ethical standards, and a realistic male image)
- Dissonance (uncertain, controversial, identity-challenging attributes of men)

### 4.6.1 Data on Being a Man across the years

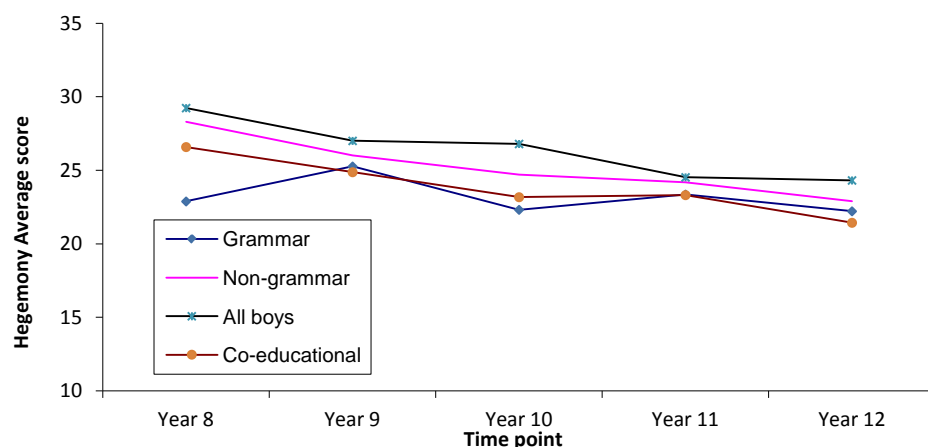
There were significant changes in boys' perceptions of what it means to be a man during the five years of this study (see table 18). In the first year when boys were in early adolescence, irrespective of school type, levels of hegemony were relatively high across the whole sample revealing that for them, a man should be dominant, aggressive, competitive, a good fighter, rich and good at sports. However, there was a significant yearly decrease in the hegemonic archetype view across the following years of the study which suggests that as adolescent boys mature, they are less likely to accept masculine stereotypes and begin forming their own interpretations of what it means to be a man and how a man should behave.

**Table 18. Means scores across the time points for a selection of factors**

Being a man	Time 1 (Year 8)	Time 2 (Year 9)	Time 3 (Year 10)	Time 4 (Year 11)	Time 5 (Year 12)	Highest possible score for factor
Hegemony	27.27	25.07	24.36	23.71	22.80	40
Duty	32.41	33.31	32.70	33.09	33.86	40
Dissonance	6.15	6.87	7.22	8.04	7.40	15

The greatest differences in hegemony levels occurred at Year 8 with boys from all-boys schools having the highest levels and boys from co-educational and grammar schools having the lowest levels on average (See table 19). Thereafter the school type levels of hegemony converged more at a decreased level in Year 12. However boys from all-boys schools still had the highest levels of hegemony.

**Table 19 Mean plot showing change in hegemony by school type**



Across the years those boys with high misbehaviour levels were also significantly higher in hegemony levels compared to the other groupings. In contrast, those boys with low misbehaviour levels also self-reported the lowest levels of hegemony.

Boys with the characteristics of low academic motivation/preference and higher levels of misbehaviour had the highest levels of hegemony. In contrast, boys with the characteristic of high academic motivation/preference, and had misbehaved less often had the lowest levels of hegemony.

Table 18 further reveals that duty remained a strong and consistent element of being a man across all years suggesting that a man having moral and ethical responsibility and providing for their family was important to these boys throughout adolescence. This suggests that moral and ethical development has been firmly established in these boys during pre-adolescence and is firmly cemented during early to mid-adolescence.

Table 18 shows a significant increase in dissonance levels up to year 11 with a slight dip towards the Year 10 average level in the final time point (Year 12). These scores indicate a moderately high level of dissonance-that is uncertainty and confusion about the more controversial, identity-challenging factors about what it means to be a man. This suggests that during early adolescence boys become increasingly confused / uncertain about particular aspects of being a man such as 'a man should hug another man,' 'can have a boyfriend,' or 'it's ok for a man to cry.' The increase in dissonance levels up to Year 11 suggests that up to mid-adolescence boys appear to struggle with male behaviour that is contrary to the typical masculine stereotype. The dip in dissonance levels in Year 12 however, suggests that as these boys approached late adolescence their views had broadened and they presented a more maturing attitude about the more controversial and identity challenging aspects of being a man.

Boys from all-boys schools had the highest levels of dissonance at the first time point (Year 8) but their average dissonance levels were lower than most of the other schools in the final year of the study (Year 12).

There was a general trend for boys' increasing dissonance in the sample irrespective of academic motivation/preference and misbehaviour levels. In Year 8 those boys with low academic motivation/preference or low levels of misbehaviour had the lowest dissonance levels at Year 12, suggesting they had constructed narrower (hegemonic) perceptions of what it means to be a man. Those boys with high levels of misbehaviour and high academic motivation/preference groupings had the highest dissonance levels. While there were differences in hegemony and dissonance in early years between grammar and non-grammar schools this reduced significantly in Years 11 and 12.

During early adolescence these boys appeared to accept and reinforce stereotypical notions of men such as liking for power, status, money and heterosexuality. However, by mid-adolescence these concrete male stereotypes became less acceptable in regard to what it means to be a man and increased thought was given to the more intellectual, abstract and moral themes of masculinity, which are not necessarily determined by stereotypes. This suggests that because boys' perceptions and attitudes are likely to change as they mature, it is important they are not stereotyped or labelled according to the perceptions and attitudes they formed during early adolescence.

Findings reveal that how these boys understand what it means to be a man during adolescence is complex, negotiated and renegotiated according to age and other social factors. What is not clear is how the school and its curriculum influences, assists or enables boys to reflect upon the movement between hegemony, duty and dissonance. Evidence from this study suggests that from early to mid-adolescence, boys are capable of at least beginning to consider the kinds of issues, values and beliefs that are important to their future development as responsible young men who have begun to process complex and emotionally challenging issues. Findings further suggest that perceptions of

masculinity shift over time and the nature of becoming a man becomes more complex during mid to late adolescence as boys begin to form their own, rather than predefined masculine identities. Understanding these complexities will enable educators to make better connections between the different types of behaviour that may be evident amongst boys. For example, pressures boys feel to be seen as 'cool' or 'able to stand up for themselves' amongst their peers. Fear of being 'shamed' or 'put down' in front of their peers may also help to explain why a boy will 'stand up' to a teacher. These internal pressures are strong motivators for understanding adolescent male behaviour and may also be why many boys 'mask' their true feelings and emotions.

Findings reveal that as boys mature their understanding of what it means to be a man changes. So for example, if a boy behaves in a certain way in Years 8 and 9, this does not mean he will necessarily behave this way in Years 10-12. This maturing aspect of male development can be overlooked. In particular, as boys mature they look for and expect a different type of relationship with adults, one that acknowledges that boys can, and do change, during adolescence. It is important therefore when working with boys and young men, educators respond appropriately to the person, and not the 'mask.'

#### **4.7 Perceptions of violence questionnaire**

Throughout this investigation, boys were asked to rate a series of aggressive acts from a list where three factors were derived of how violence-related acts are perceived (see appendix six).

- The first factor suggested physical forms of violent acts such as punching, hitting, pushing and kicking as well as shouting and calling others rude names. These are labelled as 'Physical verbal' acts of aggression.
- The second factor characterised 'non-physical' violent actions such as ignoring, spreading rumours, spitting, texting, threatening, and damaging others belongings. These are labelled as 'Verbal/Demeaning' acts of violence.
- The third factor related to the most violent actions that are characterised by the use of weapons stabbings, bullying and smacking a child. These are labelled as 'Extreme/Aggressive violence'.

It must be stressed that the schools in this sample had appropriate and supportive pastoral systems in place and boys consistently reported finding this service extremely beneficial.

##### **4.7.1 Comparison of violent action related issues across years**

Taking into account the maximum possible scores for the 'Physical/Verbal' (30), 'Verbal/ Demeaning' (35) and 'Extreme/Aggressive' (20), on average across schools, perceptions in relation to level of violence in relation to 'Physical/Verbal' acts was moderate, moderately high in relation to 'Verbal/demeaning' and high in relation to 'Extreme/Aggressive.' This suggests that certain levels of perceived acts of violence were common across the whole sample.

Perceptions about physical/aggressive verbal abuse and verbal/demeaning behaviour were relatively steady and moderately high across the time points, indicating that, on average, boys saw these acts as relatively violent. Acts that were perceived as extremely violent, while slightly lower, also remained stable across the years (Table 20).

**Table 20. Mean scores across the time points for violent acts**

<b>Violent acts</b>	<b>Time 1 (Year 8)</b>	<b>Time 2 (Year 9)</b>	<b>Time 3 (Year 10)</b>	<b>Time 4 (Year 11)</b>	<b>Time 5 (Year 12)</b>
Physical / aggressive verbal	18.39	18.32	18.14	18.03	18.92
Verbal / demeaning behaviour	20.95	21.12	20.02	19.40	20.84
Extreme acts of violence	17.54	17.93	17.92	17.87	18.39

Table 21 reveals that across the years the majority of boys reported violent acts had been committed against them. Just over a quarter of the sample self-reported that no violent acts were committed against them across time points, which is a relatively small proportion of boys. Of those who had violent acts perpetrated against them, a relatively large proportion of them did not talk to anyone about the incidents. This was particularly high in Years 11 (68.9%) and 12 (66.8%), suggesting as adolescent boys get older they are more reluctant, or find it more difficult to talk to someone when they experience being the victim of a violent act. This may be due to perceived cultural norms whereby males are not supposed to show weakness. Conversely, it may be that boys believe certain forms of perceived violent acts are accepted as part of normal adolescent male experience.

**Table 21. Prevalence of self-reported violent incidents committed against boys across the time points**

<b>Prevalence of:-</b>	<b>(Year 8)</b>	<b>(Year 9)</b>	<b>(Year 10)</b>	<b>(Year 11)</b>	<b>(Year 12)</b>
Violent acts committed against them	74.6%	84.4%	80.9%	74.9%	72.3%
Did not talk about violent incident	48.8%	46.9%	44.1%	68.9%	66.8%

The majority of boys reporting levels of violence directed towards them scored low in academic motivation/preference and high in levels of misbehaviour. In relation to those boys who reported at least one act of violence against them, the majority reported low levels of academic motivation/preference (57.5%).

#### ***4.7.2 Perception of violent actions according to school attended***

Table 22 below represents the mean scores across all years for the three factors of how violence-related acts are perceived according to different school types. Findings reveal that across all years the three violence factors were on average perceived as more common in non-grammar schools than grammar schools, but particularly in levels of verbal/demeaning behaviour and perceived extreme/aggressive acts of violence. This may indicate that grammar school boys either perceive violent acts with less severity than non-grammar boys, or that levels of violence in grammar schools are less severe than levels of violence in non-grammar schools. Despite the differences, it should be noted that certain levels of violence were perceived to occur in both these school types.



**Table 22. Mean scores across time points for Violent Acts according to school types**

	<b>Physical/ Aggressive Verbal</b>				
	<b>Year 8</b>	<b>Year 9</b>	<b>Year 10</b>	<b>Year 11</b>	<b>Year 12</b>
Grammar	16.80	17.47	17.27	17.93	17.87
Non-grammar	18.20	17.24	17.38	17.33	18.15
All-boys	17.26	18.44	17.93	18.07	18.44
Co-educational	18.08	16.99	17.22	17.30	18.01
	<b>Verbal/ Demeaning Behaviour</b>				
	<b>Year 8</b>	<b>Year 9</b>	<b>Year 10</b>	<b>Year 11</b>	<b>Year 12</b>
Grammar	17.20	18.93	18.27	18.20	17.47
Non-grammar	22.66	22.73	18.60	19.30	20.83
All-boys	21.61	22.17	22.39	21.89	23.00
Co-educational	21.56	21.92	17.57	18.38	19.44
	<b>Extreme / Aggressive Acts of Violence</b>				
	<b>Year 8</b>	<b>Year 9</b>	<b>Year 10</b>	<b>Year 11</b>	<b>Year 12</b>
Grammar	16.15	15.15	16.46	18.31	17.08
Non-grammar	20.82	17.30	17.62	17.21	19.52
All-boys	18.37	19.93	18.13	19.03	19.67
Co-educational	20.27	16.11	17.21	17.03	18.87

Table 22 also shows differences across the time span between boys in co-educational schools and boys in all-boys schools in regard to their perceptions of violent acts. While there were only minor differences between the school types in regard to physical/aggressive acts of violence, boys from all-boys schools perceived verbal/demeaning and extreme/aggressive acts of violence as more prevalent than boys from co-educational schools. Differences in verbal/demeaning behaviour were particularly high in Years 10- 12 between these two school types. This may suggest that as boys in co-educational schools mature they are less likely to perpetrate acts of violence, or that acts of violence are reduced in a mixed gender environment. While the nature of violence and violent acts are complex and should not be over simplified, findings from this study suggest that boys in an all male environment appear to experience higher levels of violence than boys in a mixed gender environment. This may also indicate that in all male settings violence is not only more evident, but also more likely to be reinforced than in mixed gender environments.

#### ***4.7.3 Differences between perceptions of violence and bullying***

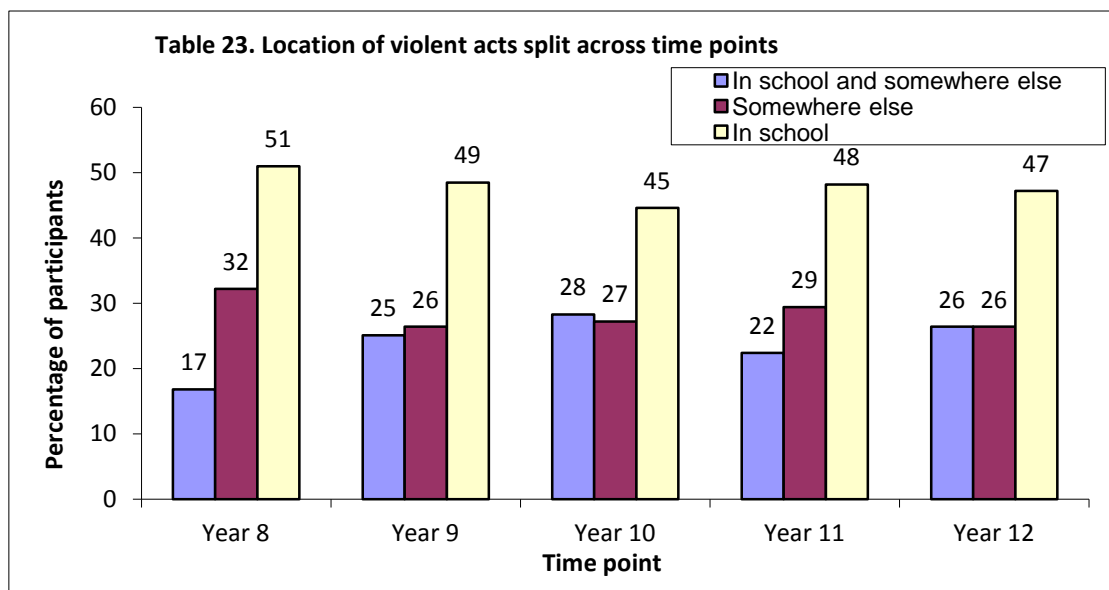
Boys were asked each year if they had experienced any form of bullying since the previous September. Across the years a consistent finding was that only a minority of boys reported being bullied averaging between 9-13% with little differences between boys from grammar and non-grammar schools and boys from co-educational and all-boys schools. Boys were also asked if they had bullied others since the previous September. Similarly, the average findings across the years showed that it was only a minority of boys who reported bullying others ranging between 10-14%.

It would also appear that boys in this sample clearly differentiated between what constitutes a violent act and bullying. In many ways violent acts were viewed as less traumatic than bullying, although it is noteworthy that bullying was primarily perpetrated by a proportionately small minority of boys (12%) on a relatively small number of boys (11.1%). However, there appeared to be a narrow judgement on what exactly constitutes bullying and contradictions in distinctions between acts of violence and bullying. Further complexities exist in how these boys understood and distinguished between acts of violence and acceptable levels of 'messaging around' which although may result in injury, was perceived as an acceptable and normal part of everyday life for these adolescent boys.

The distinctions between acts of violence, bullying and messing around are further complicated by the location of perceived acts of violence and the way in which these boys interpret where they feel safe.

#### 4.7.4 Location of violent acts against students

For those boys who indicated that violent acts were perpetrated against them, a further question investigated the locations of where these acts occurred. Table 23 reveals that the places where the violence took place remained relatively consistent across the five years of the study, with the prime location being in school.



As will be revealed in the next section, qualitative data from focus groups will show that while violent incidents did occur primarily at school, boy's perceived school as a relatively safe place in comparison to their community. Concerns about the nature and location of violence became more of an issue for these boys as they got older.

#### 4.7.5 Violent act aftermath

For participants reporting that violent acts were perpetrated against them, these boys were asked three questions investigating if they had experienced any intrusive thoughts about the incident in the last seven days. Results denoted the general rare occurrence of the trauma symptoms in boys in this sample.

Of those boys reporting being involved in a violent incident, two thirds (66.8%) consistently reported not having talked to anyone about the event in contrast to an average of one third (32.6%) reporting that they had talked to someone. Once again this suggests that certain adolescent boys need to be encouraged to talk about issues that can potentially have a negative effect upon their mental health and well-being. Raising these types of issues with boys in school will help them to see school as being more connected to other aspects of their lives and community.

## SECTION 5: FINDINGS FROM QUALITATIVE DATA

### 5.0 Overview

This section presents the qualitative data gathered across the five years from focus groups carried out with up to 76 boys each year; interviews with six Heads of Year 10; a case study of an all-boys secondary school; and findings from youth work interventions in the classroom delivered by YouthAction NI. The qualitative data was designed to provide further exploration and depth to the data emerging from the quantitative questionnaires. It is worth noting that when asked, boys in the focus groups were very willing to participate and shared their thoughts and beliefs with openness, honesty and enthusiasm.

The following table highlights how percentages are used in this report.

Minority	=	less than or equal to 20% of boys,
Significant Minority	=	More than 20% but less than or equal to 50%.
Majority	=	More than 50% but less than or equal to 80%.
Significant Majority	=	More than 80%

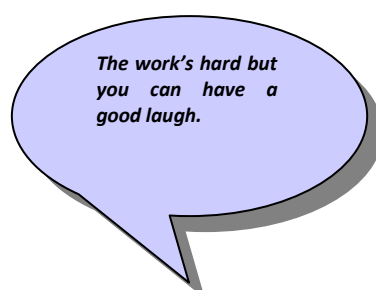
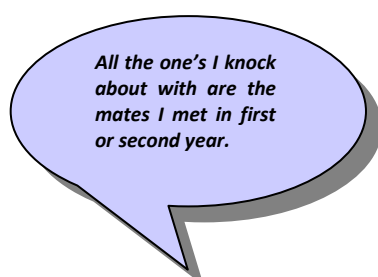
### 5.1 Focus Group Data

Up to fifteen focus groups were carried out each year with up to 76 boys from the overall sample. During the five years, 75 focus groups consisting of 380 boys participated in the study. Themes for these group discussions were identified from issues coming out of the quantitative data. Focus groups were selected by Head teachers each year from different classes to ensure that in each group there were achieving and underachieving boys.

### 5.2 Talking about school

#### 5.2.1 Personal and Social Development and Friendship

The majority of boys described school within the context of two distinct paradigms. Firstly, as the place where they were taught. Secondly, they defined school as the key place where they met new people and built friendships.



When invited to talk about their school experience the majority of boys emphasised friendships and matters relating to their personal and social development as more important than academic development. They believed that friendships and making new friends had become much more important during post-primary school than when they were in primary school. Friends were perceived as supportive and able to identify and empathise with the reality of their everyday experiences. Having friends gave them confidence and a sense of belonging within school. A significant majority believed that not having good friends in school would have a negative effect on

their school experience and could lead to bullying. Boys believed school should be a place where you learn not just about subjects but life as well. School played a key role in helping these adolescent males develop important social and interpersonal skills.

### **5.2.2 The Importance of Teacher/ Pupil and Pupil / Pupil Relationships**

A key finding that was consistent across the sample and across all years was that relationships with teachers were the most determining factor in regard to how well a boy believed he would do at school. This relationship was also powerfully associated with levels of motivation towards, and engagement with, the learning process. The majority of boys appreciated it when teachers took time to get to know them as individuals, showed interest in their lives outside of school, and treated them more like adults as they matured. For a significant minority of boys, relationships with teachers were typically strained and examples were given of how certain relationships broke down because of an incident of conflict that was unresolved at that particular time, or a belief that a teacher had “*over reacted*” to a situation. A minority of boys believed that once they had conflict with a teacher the relationship could not be maintained. However, this did not deflect from the overall desire that the majority of boys had to have a more positive relationship with their teacher. It was apparent that the majority of boys who had issues or conflict with a teacher were reluctant, or perhaps unwilling to acknowledge their role in why a relationship with a teacher may have broken down.

While relationships with teachers were perceived as important from Year 8, the nature of this relationship became particularly apparent in focus groups during Years 11 and 12. These boys were more reflective about the importance and value of this relationship. Even with those boys who had reported on occasions ‘having difficulties with a particular teacher’ there was an underlying sense of regret this particular relationship had not developed despite the conflict.

Relationships with peers also had an important influence on boys’ behaviour and attitudes towards learning, particularly in the classroom. While the majority of boys appeared to appreciate the fun and banter within their peer group, they expressed concern when teachers were unable to exercise control within the classroom. Teachers who could manage the classroom environment were perceived as ‘better teachers.’

In focus groups boys gave their opinions on what they perceived to be an ‘ideal’ and ‘not ideal’ teacher. A summary of responses are presented below.

<b>IDEAL TEACHER</b>		<b>NOT IDEAL TEACHER</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has a good relationship with you</li> <li>• Relationship develops each year</li> <li>• Knows your name and who you are</li> <li>• Is interested in you</li> <li>• Believes in you</li> <li>• Gives you praise and encouragement</li> <li>• Acknowledges that people develop at different stages</li> <li>• Looks for hidden potential</li> <li>• Helps you to develop your skills and talents</li> <li>• Asks about your life outside of school</li> <li>• Gets to know you better each year</li> <li>• Enjoys having fun</li> <li>• Can talk to them about problems</li> <li>• Don't have favourites</li> <li>• Treats you with respect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can control a class</li> <li>• Gives you time outside of class</li> <li>• Helps you with stuff you don't understand</li> <li>• Lets you talk as long as you are getting your work done and not distracting others</li> <li>• Makes things easy to understand</li> <li>• Doesn't keep you sitting for hours</li> <li>• Makes subjects interesting and connected to real life</li> <li>• Is fair</li> <li>• Treats everybody the same</li> <li>• Gives appropriate and consistent discipline</li> <li>• Sees possibilities and potential</li> <li>• Asks you about the future and your aspirations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treats you like a child</li> <li>• Doesn't get to know you</li> <li>• Knows your name but not who you are</li> <li>• Makes you feel stupid</li> <li>• Puts you down in front of your mates</li> <li>• Labels/stereotypes you</li> <li>• Has favourites</li> <li>• Does not respect you or young male culture</li> <li>• Shouts at you when you don't understand</li> <li>• Hands you a worksheet and tells you to complete it – no interaction</li> <li>• Shouts over you when you try to talk</li> <li>• Abuses their power</li> <li>• Is problem focused</li> </ul>

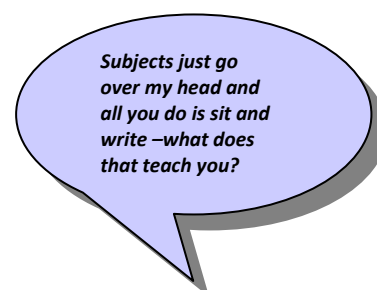
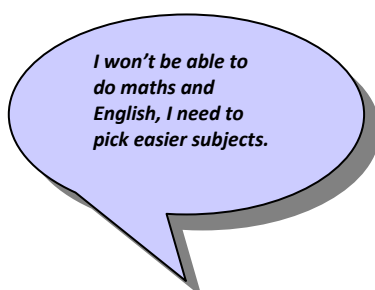
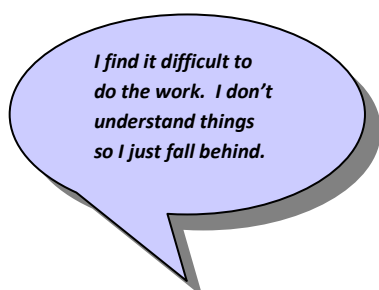
### 5.3 Barriers to learning

Boys were asked to identify barriers that impacted negatively upon their learning. These barriers were perceived as de-motivating and impacted negatively upon their overall school experiences. It must be noted that while these barriers were particularly pertinent to those who reported struggling in school and falling behind with coursework, they were common themes across the whole sample.

### 5.4 Playing catch up

A minority of boys spoke of having difficulty with literacy and numeracy and for some this meant they were falling behind with general school work and course work. This became more apparent in Year 10 when boys were studying for Key Stage Three and selecting subjects for GCSE's. These boys recalled from primary school that they struggled with reading and writing and found it increasingly difficult in post-primary school to keep up with the work. They talked about being 'switched off' from education and found their time in school a complete 'waste of time.' There were obvious differences during focus groups between boys who were doing well and those who were not. Within the groups there was a majority of boys who were doing well although they clearly found the work hard but could cope with the demands. Conversely, there was a minority of boys who were struggling, and typically in lower streams, who clearly lacked confidence in their academic ability and believed they would not do well in exams. These boys also struggled to identify the subjects they could choose for GCSE's. They spoke of "*doing the easier ones*" although they believed these subjects would be of little use to them in the future. These boys also believed there were few mechanisms in place to support them when they fell behind with school work. Falling behind and not being able to catch up were significant de-motivating factors that meant these boys disengaged from learning. At the root of this was learning and numeracy issues carried over from primary school years.

Those boys who reported they were struggling in school were asked what support they thought they needed with school work. A school providing one to one tutoring was identified as being the most beneficial for them. However this was considered an unrealistic expectation. These boys perceived that teachers were too busy and focussed on preparing pupils for exams, particularly in Years 10–12 which made it difficult for teachers to give additional support. Boys were realistic and appreciative of the demands placed upon teachers and therefore did not blame teachers or the school for being unable to provide additional support. A minority of these boys openly acknowledged that they did not enjoy studying and were not interested in most subjects. However they were aware there were potentially serious consequences of falling behind which became very apparent in Years 11 and 12.



Official government data in England for secondary school league tables in 2011 (Richardson and Sellgren, 2012) shows that just one in 15 (6.5%) of pupils starting secondary school who are 'lagging behind' for their age goes on to get five or more good GCSEs including English and maths. This

further emphasises the need for specific interventions that better prepare certain young people for the demands of GCSE's.

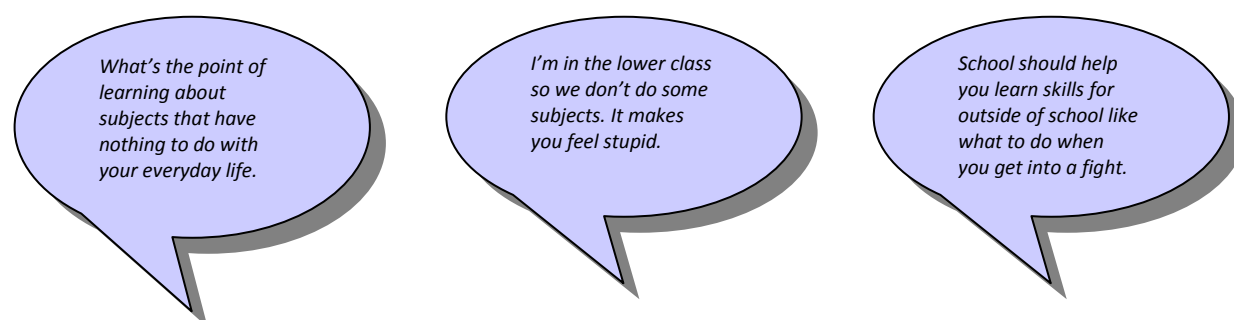
### **5.5 Boredom and distractions**

A significant majority of boys who believed they were not doing well at school spoke of being turned off by didactic teaching styles and long spells sitting at a desk writing or taking copious notes. These boys spoke of being bored during classes and displaying high levels of fidgeting such as biting their nails and twitching their feet. They would laugh about this behaviour and point to habits others in the group displayed in class. A significant minority spoke of occasions when they did not talk in class all day. Boredom was also an important contributory factor in the quantitative data where an average of 54% of boys across the years reported fidgeting and feeling restless in the classroom. When asked what teaching styles they would prefer, the majority of boys reported enjoying classes where there was discussion, movement, interaction, creativity, visits and fun. This increased attention, focus and motivation.

A significant minority of boys felt there was a lack of understanding by others of what turns boys off from learning. They desired things to change but felt powerless to do so. Boredom was given as the primary reason why they messed around in class. A minority of boys spoke of occasions of being deliberately disruptive in the class, to have 'fun' and to create a distraction. While all boys wanted school to have elements of fun, disruptions were seen as distracting them from their work.

### **5.6 Subjects not connected to the real world**

A majority of boys also reported a lack of connection between subjects and real life experiences. This was a consistent theme throughout the study. A minority of boys also felt that certain subjects such as languages and arts and drama were meaningless to them and the only reason they were given them was because they *"were not smart enough to do harder subjects"* which was very demotivating for these boys and a key reason why they disengaged from the learning process. The majority of boys believed that school should also be a place where boys learn about other aspects of their development more connected to the reality of their everyday lives both inside and outside school. They believed that school was often unconnected to the broader context of their community and should better equip them with the types of skills they need to deal with issues they face on a day to day basis.



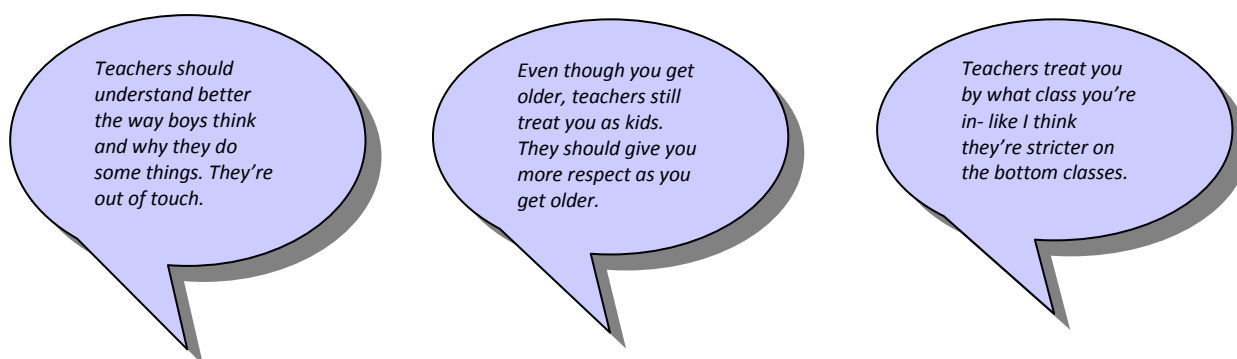
### **5.7 Inconsistent disciplinary procedures**

Frustratingly for the majority of boys disciplinary procedures were often applied inconsistently and perceived to be about punishment rather than being restorative or problem solving. As with the quantitative data, boys spoke of getting into, and causing trouble in school. A minority of boys reported being *"never out of trouble."*

While the majority of boys accepted that there needed to be discipline, they expressed their frustration in how this was administered. There was a preference expressed for disciplinary matters to be dealt with immediately rather than it being a prolonged process. The Year Head was identified as someone who could advocate for boys in disciplinary matters and act as a mediator to resolve situations. This was a particular request from Year 8 boys who felt that they were left too long to find out the consequences of being in trouble.

### **5.8 Appreciation of the 3 R's: Respect, Recognition and Responsibility**

As these boys got older they desired more respect, recognition and increased opportunities to be given more responsibility. They perceived that teachers did not appreciate male youth culture and were *"out of touch"*. Year 10–12 boys reported frustration at still being treated like children rather than maturing adults. While these boys acknowledged that they were not quite adults, they appreciated times when teachers and other adults treated them as if they were. They found it extremely patronising and disempowering when teachers and other adults did not consult with them or involve them in decision making processes and believed more recognition should be given to other qualities and abilities they possess. A significant majority of boys felt strongly that teachers and other significant adults should make more efforts to let boys know they are valued within school and treat their views, opinions and ideas with respect.



### **5.9 School physical environment**

There were mixed responses to the school building and classroom settings. A significant majority of boys believed they were well resourced and comfortable. However a significant minority also complained of *"untidy rooms, hard chairs, being in portacabins, sitting behind desks all day and the buildings being old."* These boys believed that they would do better in a more comfortable and modern environment and were able to name other schools where boys *"get everything."*

The very formal nature of the classroom also left a significant number of boys frustrated and lacking concentration particularly by having to remain silent and take notes for large parts of the day. Large classes were also identified as reasons why boys who fell behind did not receive the extra academic support they believed they needed. The size and layout of classes also impacted negatively on a significant minority of boys' attitudes towards learning.

### **5.10 Safety in school**

Year 8 and 9 boys spoke of the playground as the place where they felt most insecure. There was strong agreement by the majority of participants that boys in Years 8 and 9 should have their own morning and lunchtime breaks separate from other boys, as they perceived most bullying comes from older boys during these times. They also suggested and welcomed opportunities for older boys in Year 11 and 12 to support and mentor younger boys in school and during breaks.

Quantitative data analysis showed a falling off in reported incidents of bullying as boys progressed through school. In focus groups boys spoke of their need to feel safe and be free from bullying in

school. This was very important to boys. All participants believed that for those boys' experiencing bullying, this was perhaps the most significant barrier to their learning.

### **5.11 To GCSE's and Beyond**

In Years 10–12 there was clear evidence that preparing for GCSE's or other exams brought on considerable stress and anxiety. The majority of boys believed their GCSE results would determine their future. Whether from a grammar school or a non-grammar school, pressures were very apparent. For grammar school boys, the pressure was to do well and reach the high expectations they (and others) had of themselves. For a significant minority of non-grammar school boys, particularly those who did not expect to do well, there was almost an acceptance of the consequences of GCSE failure for their future. In the words of one boy: *"If you don't fit in – you're out!"* These boys believed there was little hope of work in the future if you fail these exams and there was no guarantee of a job even if you did well.

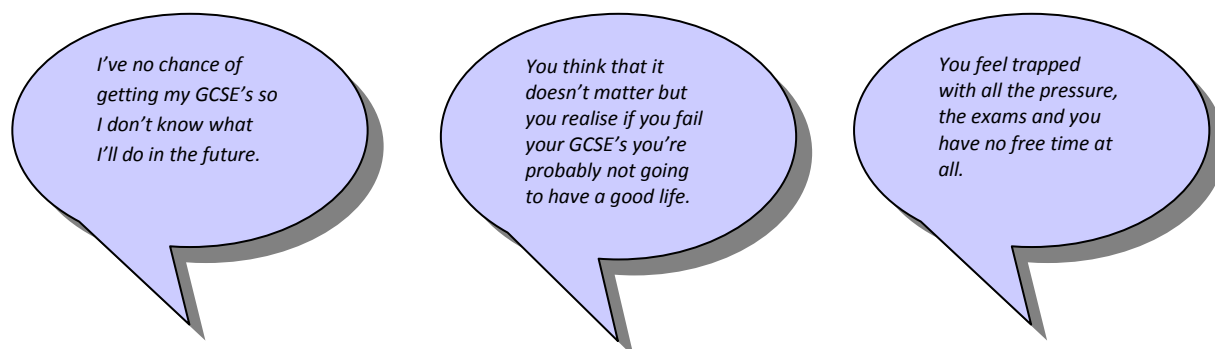
Underpinning GCSE concerns was:

- a perceived lack of a social life while preparing for GCSE's
- a lack of clarity about the benefits of education for boys
- concerns about university debt for achievers
- no immediate perceived gratification or incentives for those who are underachieving.

These were all identified as stressors that caused apathy and reduced the value that certain boys placed on education. This was the time of most negativity in focus group discussions.

### **5.12 Declining academic and career aspirations**

As with the quantitative data, there was a notable lowering of expectations in regard to future academic and career aspirations as boys progressed through post-primary school. The aspirations and dreams of a significant number of boys appeared to be seriously depleted as the consequences of not doing well in GCSE's became more apparent to them. In particular, boys who perceived themselves as underachieving were concerned at the possibility of leaving school without any formal qualifications. These boys also reported feeling unprepared for life beyond school. They desired skills that would help get them a job and feel better prepared for the future, yet felt pessimistic about ever getting a job in a slowing economy and the dawning reality that *"even with GCSE's you may not get a job."* What these boys would do beyond school became a dominating feature of focus group interviews from year 10. Boys who did not expect to get good GCSE results questioned the very purpose of going to school for twelve years when they could potentially leave with no formal qualifications and therefore produce no evidence of ever having been in school.



### **5.13 Transitions**

As with the quantitative data, transitions were a theme within focus groups. Boys spoke articulately not only about the academic pressures they experienced as they progressed through school but also



the contradictions and complexities they experienced during adolescence on the journey from boy to man.

### **5.14 Primary to Post-Primary school**

The majority of boys in Year 8 spoke primarily of *“feeling good”* about being in post-primary school. While they found the structure of the day more tiring, they enjoyed moving classes and making new friends. There was a significant minority of boys who did not feel as safe in the new school and every focus group had occasions when boys spoke of *“being picked on”* but accepted this as *“what happens to first years.”* Some boys were looking forward to their later school years when they could *“do the same to other boys.”* However, such comments were not reported in Year 9. Both the quantitative and qualitative data suggest that boys generally cope well with this transition, and any issues and concerns that boys have appear to minimise as they progress through Year 8. That is not to say that consequences of academic failure are not apparent. Those who failed the 11+ reported feeling bad at the time, but happier now they were in a new school.

### **5.15 Key Stage Three**

Key Stage Three was identified by the majority of Year 10 boys from both grammar and non-grammar schools as causing stress as boys became much more aware of the importance of doing well in GCSE's. There was pressure for boys to do well, and there was a more realistic assessment of the consequences of not doing well in GCSE's. There was a tendency for a significant minority of boys to gravitate towards the negative experiences of going through or approaching Key Stage 3. Concerns about falling behind in subjects, and not being able to catch up were more acute in Year 10. It was more apparent during this year that boys placed greater emphasis on the importance of having good relationships with different teachers and connecting this to how well they would do in a subject. It was also at this time that boys became more acutely aware of their need for additional tuition.

### **5.16 Having the same form teacher**

Year 10 boys preferred having the same Form Teacher throughout post-primary school, reinforcing what they had particularly expressed in Years 8 and 9. They liked having consistency and believed they could talk to a Form Teacher about school issues, as they were also more likely to discuss issues with a teacher they knew, trusted and respected, even if they did not have a particularly good relationship with that teacher. The boys need for reassurance, to feel secure and supported was a strong feature of this period of their development.

While schools did offer counselling, usually one day per week, very few of the boys in focus groups reported attending these sessions.

### **5.17 Feelings about the transition from boy to man– The Janus period** (In Roman mythology Janus was the god of beginnings and transitions)

Throughout the study, the majority of boys consistently spoke about the pressures and confusion of moving away from childhood behaviours to becoming, and being accepted as a young man. As they matured they felt increasing frustration when they attempted to engage maturely with adults through conversations, contesting, questioning, taking risks and accepting consequences, yet felt they were still treated as children. The transition from dependence to independence was strongly welcomed by the majority of participants. When parents and teachers trusted and respected boys, they believed this strengthened those relationships. Participants responded extremely positively to being given freedom within the parameters of a secure and supportive setting (i.e. school and family home) and appreciated being recognised as maturing young adults. For these boys becoming a man

was not defined by a timeline or rite of passage. Rather it represented a time when adults would treat them as adults and show them respect. These comments are from Year 11 boys.



### **5.18 The Construction of Masculine Identities**

For the majority of boys, perceptions of masculinity became more complex as they progressed through post-primary school. There was a move away from stereotypical notions of being a man in Years 8 and 9, through Years 10-12, to a more considered and maturing and less stereotypical understanding of what it means to be a man. Year 10-12 boys were more inclined to question masculine stereotypes and begin to form their own opinions of manhood.

The majority of boys struggled with beginnings, endings and transitions both personally and within school, looking to the future yet holding on to the perceived security of the past in school. There appeared to be little in place to support boys through adolescence as they wrestled with the complex and contradictory ways in which they cemented their masculine identity. This was a key reason why addressing masculinity underpinned the youth work interventions where boys were encouraged to reflect upon how adhering to narrow interpretations of masculinity can potentially impact negatively upon a boy's attitudes, health and behaviour.

### **5.19 Experiences of Violence, Community and Space**

This longitudinal study was also concerned about adolescent boys' experiences outside of school and the extent to which experiences and perceptions of violence impacted upon their lives and development.

#### **5.20 Community**

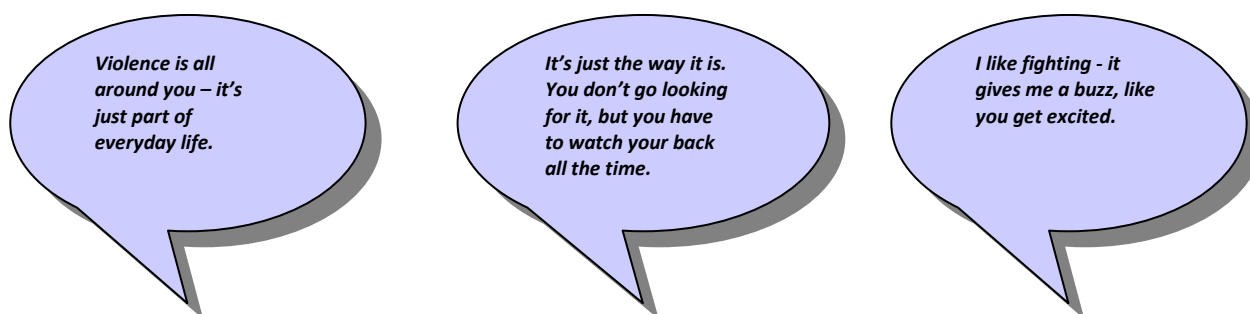
While the majority of boys spoke consistently of feeling part of their school, they also perceived school as separate from the wider community. Boys' thoughts on their community, as in the home and in school, were determined primarily by the ways in which they believed they were perceived by other adults. The majority of boys felt alienated from their community and decision making processes. They also believed that as they got older more adults increasingly treated them with suspicion and distrust. This was consistent regardless of which school type or community boys belonged to. They wanted acceptance into the community and the adult world but were unaware of any processes to enable this to happen.

#### **5.21 Violence**

As the majority of boys progressed through adolescence there was growing awareness and more considered thought given to violence and its place in their lives. In Years 8 and 9 a significant minority of boys spoke of "getting into fights and being picked on by older boys." There was a lack of clarity as to whether these incidents were simply "boys messing around" or real acts of violence. The majority of boys refused to admit that they were hurt during these incidences and appeared to

accept that this is what happens when you go to “big” school. It was evident that the boundaries between what these boys perceived as healthy male banter and acts of violence were unclear. This appears to be an aspect of adolescent male development whereby boys are left to their own devices to understand and negotiate. Therefore these boys expected there to be times when they would get ‘picked on’ and vice versa times when they may be perpetrators of messing around that could be perceived as acts of violence.

Showing they could ‘cope’ with conflict and violence was mentioned by a minority of boys as being part of the way in which they demonstrated to others they were becoming men. By Year 10, a significant majority of boys appeared resigned to the reality of conflict and violence as part of adolescent male experience. For these boys concerns about their personal safety had become a daily consideration. This was reinforced in Years 11 and 12 as boys reported conflict and violence as ‘*the way it is*’ and something that was part of “*growing up*.” For these boys violence was on the increase and could potentially occur at any time and in any place.



Consistently, the majority of boys described their schools and homes as safe, and their own communities often as being unsafe. Most other communities were deemed as ‘out of bounds’ unless they were in significant numbers. A minority of boys spoke of times when they went into other areas looking for conflict and viewed this as “*a bit of fun*.” These boys spoke openly of being perpetrators of violence within their communities, out on the streets, drawn to riots, anti-social activities even if this was only as an observer. For these boys, the ‘buzz’ associated with violence was an attraction, while for the majority of boys violence was something to be feared.

Boys from all schools reported that paramilitaries were still active in both sides of the community and their views of them were mixed. Some saw paramilitaries as a positive force in their community, while others thought they ‘harassed’ boys and made the area ‘less fun’. A significant minority of boys reported knowing members of paramilitary groups, where they lived and how they feared getting into trouble with them.

As boys got older they consistently reported being viewed as a threat by other boys and young men. They also believed they were view negatively by many adults in their communities and the police. A significant majority of boys from all focus groups reported that the police were too often absent from their communities and there were many incidents that were never reported to the police. On occasions the police were perceived by a minority of boys as being against the community, and even out to actively harass groups of boys and young men.

A significant majority of boys reported as they got older there was less organised activity for them to do (or they thought what was there was boring), so they believed they were only left with home or the street for their enjoyment. While this was common amongst all boys, those from rural areas reported being less able to participate in certain recreational activities due to the lack of public or available transport.

Sectarianism, ethnicity, geography and alcohol emerged as important factors in regard to their experience of violence. In spite of the peace process in Northern Ireland, a significant majority of boys believed very little had changed in regard to their experience of violence. There were examples given of fighting at interface areas and stones being thrown at their school bus as they went through certain areas. Not one boy we spoke to was involved in, or understood their role in a peacebuilding society. In fact many did not know what the researchers were talking about in this regard.

While the majority of boys had no specific way of responding to acts of violence, they spoke enthusiastically about their need to learn avoidance strategies that were integral to their lives. A minority spoke of moving from home to school and back avoiding contact with anyone who may be a danger to them, while at the other extreme a majority of boys had a view about which areas, people and situations were safe. The majority of boys believed their personal mobility was severely restricted by their self-assessments of safe and unsafe places.

All boys spoke openly about their experiences of violence and this also became a subject that was developed during the youth work interventions.

### ***5.22 Space and territory***

As boys got older, there was a welcoming sense that their recreational space had significantly changed and widened. For example, they were now able to use public transport on their own and work in part-time jobs which meant they could participate in a range of recreational activities which further exposed them to particular aspects of youth culture such as drugs and alcohol.

Having their own space and territory was important for these boys. They liked to go to places where they could be themselves. However they were very aware of the negative ways in which many adults in their communities labelled boys as 'hoods' and 'trouble makers' to describe them.

### ***5.23 Key findings from focus group data***

The main issues arising from focus group interviews were:

- School is seen as place for building friendships, and academic development often took second place when boys were talking about their school life
- Boys feel relatively safe in school
- Boys placed importance on having a good working relationship with teachers that reflected their growing maturity and wish for more responsibility. Relationships based on mutual respect were desired.
- Barriers to learning from boys' point of view included:
  - Falling behind in school and course work and feeling they could not catch up
  - The lack of basic literacy and numeracy skills that are being carried forward from primary school and are not attended to early on in post primary school
  - Getting bored easily and allowing this to show itself in disruptive behaviour in the classroom or simply turning off from the teacher
  - A lack of connection between subjects and their everyday lives
  - The pressures that start to build around Year 10 and carry on through to Year 12 and their need for dedicated support at these times
  - A lack of belief that success in school would actually lead to a job and fears of debt if they go to university.
  - Concurrent with 'pressures and stresses' of pre GCSEs is the period in a boy's life when he may be struggling or coming to terms with his identity. These are further complicated by issues about becoming a man and what it is meant by masculinity.

These pressures do not appear to be addressed in the classroom and therefore may be invisible or disregarded in determining the type and nature of support required by some boys at this stage of their development.

- Boys appeared to be unprepared for key transitional stages during adolescence
- Violence (or threat of violence) was perceived as part of their everyday lives and boys believed it was important to show others that you can cope with any threat of conflict or violence
- Boys reported ongoing levels of sectarianism and increased racial prejudice
- Boys felt alienation within their communities and disconnected from the world of adults
- Boys did not feel part of peace building processes and displayed a lack of awareness in their role towards creating a new society

We believe there is much potential and benefits to boys for topics such as adolescence, transitions, violence, masculinity, peacebuilding, and community life to be more integrated into school.

## **SECTION 6: FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH HEADS OF YEAR 10**

### **6.0 Overview**

This small scale study was carried out with six very experienced Year Ten Head Teachers (with at least ten years teaching-usually in their current schools) in order to explore their thoughts on why certain boys may be underachieving and to identify their schools' understanding, strategies and ways of approaching underachieving boys. Interviews were carried out in two all-boys and four co-educational post-primary schools. Four head teachers were male and two were female. Five of the schools were part of the longitudinal study and the other was a school where other work by the Centre for Young Men's Studies staff was being delivered. More specifically the study aimed to:

- a) Identify what schools are doing to engage boys and increase achievement;
- b) Help to understand what teachers observe in their work with boys;
- c) Discover workable strategies (in the classroom and across the school as a whole);
- d) Discover what schools do to get the best out of boys.

The main findings included:

### **6.1 Family breakdown and changes**

While there was an acknowledgement that there have always been one parent families, most said that they thought the increasing number was having a significant impact on young people's lives. Although not gender specific, these teachers thought this had a disproportionate impact on boys because it was usually the fathers who had left the family home which suggested a lack of male role models at home.

### **6.2 Primary schools**

All but one teacher was of the view that the last three to five years had seen a downward trend in the basic skills and attitudes of significant numbers of boys coming from primary schools. There were lower literacy and numeracy levels, poorer communication skills and emotional expression as well as lower levels of independence and responsibility.

### **6.3 Boys taking longer to settle**

Year heads often mentioned that boys took longer to settle when they arrived in Year 8. Some said this was because they were arriving as failures (having failed their 11 +). While this can also happen to girls, these teachers believed that boys take longer to get used to the change in structure at post-primary school and struggle more with the social side of school. All of these were seen as having an impact on boys' motivation.

### **6.4 Boys being 'mammied'**

Some went further to say that the relationships between boys and their mothers impacted on boys' attitudes and behaviour. It was suggested that some boys lacked independence and responsibility when arriving in school and when these boys found school life difficult they wanted to get their mothers into school to sort out problems. It was also suggested that some boys came into school and treated female teachers as they did their mother (expecting them to respond in the same way) and this often caused difficulties for some female teachers.

## **6.5 Learning styles**

One school, during their initial tests, looked at pupils' preferred learning styles. They found that boys preferred kinaesthetic styles, while girls were more likely to be auditory learners, with both tending to learn visually as well. Kinaesthetic learning is a physical style using touch, action, movement and hands-on work. This general preference became more apparent lower down the band scale (boys and girls in the top band were more likely to be auditory and visual, while those in the bottom band were kinaesthetic and visual).

## **6.6 General communication skills and emotional expression**

All of the co-educational teachers mentioned boys' lower ability to communicate and show their emotions. Schools tended to describe communication and emotional expression as areas that cut across many of the other reasons for boys' underachievement. They described boys getting into more conflict because of a lack of talk-based strategies for resolving conflict. Boys were less willing to participate in classroom discussion, ask questions and generally participate if they thought they might look inadequate. Boys also didn't use the pastoral and support services as much as girls and this was, in part, put down to them being offered in a talk and emotion-led form within which, again, boys felt less confident.

## **6.7 Motivation and gender differences**

Differences in levels of motivation between boys and girls were highlighted and teachers emphasised the importance of having motivated pupils. In general boys came out as showing less motivation than girls. Each teacher highlighted the importance of school being linked to the outside world as a critical factor in engaging and motivating (especially lower band) boys. Having realistic work opportunities were perceived to be important in terms of Year 11 and 12 boys' motivation.

The most pronounced gender differences mentioned were:

- a. Variation in motivation especially boys in lower bands;
- b. Poorer communication skills especially with boys in lower bands;
- c. Behaviour, with boys seen as more challenging (again in the lower bands) and
- d. Work presentation by girls was seen as consistently higher.

## **6.8 Effecting Change**

From this report there were three areas in particular that schools could get tangible results from:

- Recognising the differences between the broad range of boys and their different needs. Very little that teachers told us involved all boys and gender was probably not the primary factor, but it was often a significant secondary factor. (see Appendix 7 for a practical way for grouping boys)
- Identifying and understanding what motivates boys and implementing approaches that exist to enable boys' motivation to increase. While schools used incentives, the more schools understand this critical area the more they will be able to engage boys and raise their achievement levels.
- Targeting different ways in which boys can recognise their learning and different approaches that would enable boys to see that they are building a skills base as well as a knowledge base.

## **SECTION 7: A CASE STUDY OF AN ALL-BOYS SECONDARY SCHOOL**

### **7.0 Overview**

This case study was carried out in an all-boys secondary school that was not participating in the longitudinal study. The catchment area for the school includes a number of urban wards where unemployment, poverty, educational underachievement and effects of the Troubles have impacted for more than a generation. While the success or failure of a school cannot be reduced to one or two components, this case study identified several key reasons why it has been particularly successful in improving educational attainment amongst adolescent males. While these steps might not be replicable elsewhere, they represent an approach that has shown significant success for these pupils. It is like pieces of a jigsaw whereby it is not complete unless all the pieces are put together and present.

Unlike in many schools, boys here are not seen as in need of adapting to the school regime, instead the school appears to meet boys halfway, concentrating on the most basic motivations to enable boys to work and achieve.

### **7.1 Rewards and incentives**

Most schools use rewards and incentives, but the school don't just *use* incentives and rewards they construct much of what they do *around* them. Boys are introduced to a points system for attendance, punctuality, uniform, behaviour, casual reading, work produced and points gained from additional tasks taken voluntarily (such as clearing the playground) and the absence of detention, incidents of inappropriate behaviour, being late or not handing in a homework and having suspension(s). At the end of each month these results are posted in the classroom and if boys achieve enough points then trips such as paint balling are on offer.

Rewards and incentives are used to keep boys on track and motivated, and those boys who miss out on the trips are approached and asked 'How can you earn more points?' This focuses the boy on such areas as punctuality and attendance and results in a different, more positive, conversation rather than the more traditional 'What have you done wrong?' A focus is placed on addressing the behaviour that may be blocking potential rewards.

### **7.2 Results and not process focussed**

Staff keep their eye on the results and are much less concerned about the educational process. Schools will know that motivation, concentration and maintaining focus are all critical areas in enabling achievement, and that these are all areas significant numbers of boys find difficult. The school appears to manage this very well and actively seek to address any loss of motivation or lapses in concentration or focus in boys that potentially could impede good results.

### **7.3 Discipline follows the same approach**

There is zero tolerance for poor behaviour. If pupils 'mess around' in class, they are given a yellow card (warning) then a red card (asked to leave the class and sit in the corridor). Senior teachers can see all the way down that corridor and the first question asked of the pupil is 'What is your home telephone number?' The number is phoned and the pupil talks to their parent before the phone is given back to the teacher. The school also uses suspensions as a way to get boys back on track. In 2007–08 the school had the highest number of suspensions of any urban school, but this is seen as a means to an end. It also involves parents in ways that connects school, home and boy.



#### **7.4 Pupil-centred approach**

All teachers are told their first aim is to 'get the relationship right with a pupil'. The lesson subject comes second to ensuring that pupils are engaged. Teachers are encouraged to find as many different ways of understanding what interests pupils as possible. This could be football for some or may be a range of other interests for others. In some classes, teachers will chop and change from formal teaching to chat, so the focus stays on engagement and rapport. Initially, for some classes, this may mean more chat than work, but teachers are encouraged to see the long-range goal, and are more concerned about pupil retention and understanding than just getting the subject taught. It is relational driven as well results driven.

#### **7.5 Community-centred approach**

The school's catchment area includes a number of wards where unemployment and poverty have impacted for more than a generation. Often parents will see themselves at odds with the school in terms of their child's education, or will abdicate their parental responsibility to the school. The school counteracts this by involving boys in community projects and fund raising for local initiatives. Parents are actively involved in discipline (as above) and of course, parents evenings. Not only is there a high expectation for parents to be involved, but a genuine belief that home and school should work together.

#### **7.6 Leadership is strong**

The Principal has been at the school for about ten years and there is no doubt that he has been a crucial part of the school's success. Other staff members describe him as passionate, committed and inspirational, and there seems to be the utmost respect for him. He is supportive of his staff, but even more supportive of his pupils. He is primarily concerned with his pupils' achievements. This single-mindedness means that some of the niceties of education and ideology do not get a look-in and if methods and approaches do not work they are abandoned. No-nonsense, direct, pupil focused and practical – that's what drives his leadership style.

It is hard to imagine staff staying long at this school unless they shared this practical approach. Since pupil rapport and retention get equal attention as teaching style, teachers are judged on delivery. When new teachers arrive at the school they are inducted into the approaches used. This often includes senior teachers demonstrating rapport and methods that encourage retention. Staff are encouraged to keep boys focussed, engaged, challenged and involved.

#### **7.7 In the 'real' world**

While some of the trips and rewards are just pure fun and enjoyment, many of them are also ways to encourage these working class boys to see what the wider world looks like. International trips broaden experiences, horizons and certainly aspirations and motivation. The head and other staff use their personal contacts to provide boys with learning experiences and opportunities to meet people that may enable boys to see a different future for themselves. The school's former pupils are also actively involved in providing stimulating opportunities for the boys.

#### **7.8 Key findings from All-Boys secondary school**

A successful school can be made up of many things but we offer these three key areas as emanating from this case study - findings which are also reflected in the 2009 DE policy document 'Every School a Good School.'

1. Strong leadership from school principals that is underpinned by all staff
2. Connection with the community in which it resides.
3. Partnership with pupils (in this case the boys).

## SECTION 8: NON-FORMAL EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES

### 8.0 Overview

As part of the overall methodology, YouthAction delivered three classroom interventions per year in two schools during Years 8–11. While members of the wider research team also participated in these classes, the interventions were led by YouthAction staff. The final year of the study involved completing focus group interviews with these boys about their experiences of these classroom interventions. One was a semi-rural comprehensive school and the other an inner city Belfast secondary school. The sessions were delivered within school and lasted between 90 minutes to two hours each time. The approach was aimed at energising and engaging boys through youth work methodologies with a relational focus. The themes and issues that were addressed mirrored the issues emanating from the quantitative and qualitative data. While masculinity was addressed as a specific theme in year one, this focus underpinned sessions throughout subsequent years. Themes addressed in these sessions included: Masculinity and becoming a man (year 1); Emotions (year 2); Conflict; violence; personal safety & anger (years 2 & year 4) Risk taking (year 3); Education and learning (year 4); Health (year 4); Male transitions (year 4) and Life skills (year 4).

From the outset, tables and chairs were moved around to suit the non-formal aspects of the sessions and to allow for movement while doing icebreakers and energisers. Classes were also set up to be interactive and enable small group work, large circles and work in pairs. Teaching staff who were available on the day took part in the smaller working groups. In Years 3 and 4, one of the schools moved the sessions to three mobile classrooms, which again were adapted to suit the type of sessions that were being delivered. Therefore, regardless of the setting, consideration was given to the physical learning environment.

The youth work interventions demonstrated the value of taking time to build relationships with boys. Topics and issues that were connected to their everyday lives encouraged boys to share feelings and emotions and engage with subjects at a deeper level. Boys who reported “*not being good at school work*” often displayed other qualities during sessions which made them feel good about themselves. On occasions when this did happen youth workers reinforced the value of the boy’s input. Feedback also revealed that boys looked forward to the sessions. They remembered the names of the youth workers and asked about those who were not attending on that particular day. They clearly enjoyed the content, were highly motivated and engaged actively with subjects.

Feedback from the boys across the study about the process and purpose of the interventions was very positive. They really enjoyed the interactive style and liked the fact that icebreaker games were used to orientate them to the subject matter. They believed this broke up the intensity of sessions. The interventions consistently demonstrated that boys were highly motivated by interventions that combined energy, activity, creativity and fun to address issues. They also enjoyed learning by visualising situations rather than memorising information, which gave them a strong sense of personal achievement in contrast to learning solely through intellectual capabilities.

Boys reported learning new skills and thinking more about situations rather than just reacting. Story telling about ‘other boys’ was adopted to make controversial issues (e.g. alcohol misuse, violence) less personal, yet nevertheless one with which they could readily identify. The boys very quickly connected this to their own lives and experiences and were able to add their personal story to the scenario. This gave participants a sense of control over content and increased their confidence to participate in class discussions. What was particularly striking was the way in which boys listened attentively to the stories. For example, there was total silence as the story teller outlined a scenario where young men were confronted with a story about potentially violent situations. Each time the story reached a potentially threatening situation, the story was paused and they broke out into small

groups and asked what they would do in that situation. This methodology fully captured the imagination of the boys and led to intense class discussions. Boys were encouraged to think of the types of skills they could use to try and alleviate potentially violent situations. Skills development was a key outcome of the interventions.

While many boys noted the importance of schooling and qualifications they also reported frustration at the more formalised aspects of school such as having to wear uniforms; the teaching day being too long and repetitive; expectations placed upon them being too high; some male teachers acting 'hard'; and *"teachers giving you the work but not teaching you the work."*

### **8.1 Outcomes Based Approach**

To assist the youth work interventions an outcomes-based approach and evaluation was developed that emphasised a conscious approach to addressing specific outcomes. The outcomes based intervention was developed to measure how boys assessed themselves in relation to their knowledge, attitude and behaviours in relation to the issues being addressed. The purpose of this was to identify outcomes, measure outcomes, interpret data and to re-present the data in a meaningful way. 78 boys from the two case study schools took part in the evaluation. The results of evaluation revealed that between the start and end of the interventions there was a:

- 21% overall increase in relation to boys' knowledge, attitude and behaviour towards their own learning. This included their experience in school, and their attitude towards school and how it can support knowledge and skills development.
- 13.5% increase in the appreciation boys had about how *'school teaches to me to grow as a person'*
- 10% increase among young men in their knowledge of health issues and who they could approach for support in matters relating to their own health
- 17% increase in boys' knowledge and awareness of environments, places and situations where conflict was most likely to happen.

### **8.2 Feedback from teachers**

Feedback from teachers who witnessed the interventions provoked similar comments:



### **8.3 Insights from Practice**

The youth work interventions provided valuable insights into the importance and benefits of addressing contextual issues that impact upon boys and young men's lives that are not typically covered in school curriculum. This is perhaps a key reason why these boys believed that adults (teachers and others) do not understand them and are distant. The interventions demonstrated that by addressing issues, including controversial and sensitive subjects, school was perceived as connecting more directly to their learning and everyday lives and experiences. The interventions also

helped boys prepare in practical ways for the future and enabled them to learn and rehearse new skills. They appreciated being asked about what they think and being encouraged to share their experiences and feelings. They reported feeling that they were listened to and their opinions were valued. They also appreciated learning in a way that established trust and mutual respect.

The interventions challenged the notion held by many boys that school is boring and repetitive, and often irrelevant to their everyday lives. The interventions took cognisance of findings in the quantitative data where boys reported high levels of fidgeting, restlessness, being easily distracted, being nervous in new situations. In contrast, these young men were highly motivated, had fun, and demonstrated resilience and creativity through their actions and feedback. Participants in both case study schools said that they would ‘definitely’ want to learn more about these subjects if they were offered in school.

It is important to note that the issues raised by boys in the two schools were often different and therefore it should not be pre-empted what issues boys will raise. While it was not possible to address thoroughly every issue boys identified as important, for example, sexual relationships, sexuality, alcohol and drugs and getting a job, the interventions revealed the extent of issues that adolescent boys would welcome as part of a school curriculum. The design of the classes encouraged full participation regardless of a boy’s academic ability. There were many occasions when boys would tell members of the research team about difficulties they were having with various aspects of school work and would make comments such as “*we like the way you do things.*”

Over the four years of the interventions, masculinity was linked to all aspects of the sessions. This was important as quantitative data was consistently highlighting shifting complexities within the formation of masculine identities throughout early to mid-adolescence. This enabled boys to reflect upon male attitudes and behaviour and challenge traditional stereotypical hegemonic interpretations of men and masculinity.

Importantly, boys believed that school was the best and safest place to reflect upon potentially difficult and controversial issues. They believed this would be much more difficult outside of school and were concerned as to who would deliver the sessions. They also reported that the developing trust with youth workers and being shown respect were key reasons why they enjoyed the sessions and would share their feelings openly. This was the view of the majority of boys, although there was a small minority who initially resisted getting involved in some of the exercises. While no boy was forced to participate, all were encouraged to get involved. Other boys believed it was useful to talk to youth workers as they would have found it difficult to discuss certain issues in front of a teacher, particularly with someone they may have had some previous conflict.



#### **8.4    *Key findings arising from non-formal educational approaches***

- The approach by youth workers was relationship driven and developed as the boys matured across the five years.
- Boys felt appreciated, valued and understood during sessions.
- The informal way in which the classroom was set up assisted in establishing purposeful discussions and greater interaction between boys and youth workers.
- Small and large group techniques were effective in facilitating open discussion and interaction.
- The classroom was perceived by boys as a safe place where they could learn and take calculated risks during enjoyable activities focussed on personal and social development.
- Boys had a sense of ownership of the agenda and could influence session content.
- Boys were encouraged to share feelings and be empathetic towards one another.
- Topics discussed enabled boys to reflect upon sensitive and controversial issues and made learning in school more directly connected to boys' everyday lives and experiences.
- Boys were able to rehearse and practice skills as well as increase knowledge and self-awareness.
- Boys were encouraged to reflect upon their learning at the end of each session.
- The process was as important as the outcomes.

## **SECTION 9: KEY STATEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (WITH PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS)**

An aim of this longitudinal study was to attempt to find more practical ways to promote the value of education and how school could become a more positive learning experience for boys. In order to achieve this we present the following key findings, recommendations and practical considerations in a way that may be of use to policy makers, schools, teachers, parents and all those who work with boys and young men. It is important to note that whilst these are directed towards boys' education and learning, many could also be of benefit to female pupils.

The majority of these suggestions do not require additional resources but focus on finding more creative ways of engaging and responding to the needs and issues that some boys present. This will require more collaboration amongst professions in order to provide added value and support that can complement formal education. Implementing these suggestions will necessitate sustained commitment from schools, teachers, parents, local communities and all those who are committed to '*taking boys seriously*' in their work with boys and young men. It will require increased self-awareness through gender conscious interventions that are appreciative of internal and external factors that impact upon adolescent boys and will require approaches that advocate a holistic view to education and extend across the school curriculum. This requires an educational experience that puts the needs of individual boys at the heart of the learning process. It is about maturing teacher / pupil relationships that provide opportunities for increased responsibility as boys get older. Relationships based upon growing mutual respect and restorative approaches to addressing problems. These are just a few of the many ways presented in this final section of the report through which school can become a more valuable learning experience for boys and young men.

### ***9.0 Factors that may affect levels of boys' underachievement***

The following factors may affect the level of boys' achievement:

1. Early identification of barriers to learning
2. Gender specific approaches
3. Mental, emotional, physical health and self-esteem
4. Masculinity and becoming a man
5. Support for transitions during adolescence
6. Relationships with teachers
7. Youth work methodologies
8. The educational environment
9. Links between education and 'real' life
10. Positive behaviour policy
11. Impact of experiences of violence

#### ***1. Early Identification of barriers to learning***

##### **Key Statement**

Teachers believed that barriers to learning were usually evident by, and within Year 8, and had been present in primary school.

##### **Recommendation 1**

Barriers to learning should be addressed as early as possible (e.g. primary school) and stronger links between primary and post-primary schools, parents and communities should be developed to support transferring pupils and address issues.

## **Evidence**

- Boys falling behind felt unable to 'catch up' with their peers.
- When boys 'fell behind' in their studies they often became defeatist and lacked ambition or a positive approach towards pending examinations. Their self-esteem lowered and their overall perceptions of school became more negative.
- Boys wanted better systems in place to support them if or when they fall behind with their school work.
- Boys who had fallen behind reported that they would benefit from additional academic support at the earliest point when they experience falling behind in their work. While they perceived that one to one tuition would be the most helpful way to receive academic support, they believed this would not be realistic due to time constraints upon individual teachers.
- Boys expressed concern that there were few mechanisms in place to support them with literacy and numeracy difficulties when they fell behind with work, particularly during exam preparation.
- Boys who fell behind said they found themselves placed in lower classes which left them feeling discouraged.
- Boys who spoke of struggling at school perceived themselves as failures spiralling downwards without any intervention strategy to break this cycle, or the offer of an alternative way of learning.
- Key Stage Three was perceived as a crucial time in school as for the first time boys began to think seriously about GCSE selection and their future beyond school.
- Poorly informed decisions at this time have major implications in regard to boys' aspirations beyond school.
- From Year 10 boys in this study became increasingly aware of the importance of exams (GCSE's). They reported much more cognisance of the consequences of not doing well at GCSE compared to the 11+ and connected failure at GCSE level as being a key determinant of their future life/career opportunities. Striking differences in attitudes were apparent between those who expected to do well and those who did not.
- In focus groups, boys also reported frustration at being offered no alternative to GCSE's, even though they expected to fail subjects. These boys felt powerless to change their circumstances and found it difficult to see a successful future. This sense of disillusionment leading to apathy was most tangible.
- Boys who are unlikely to achieve positive educational outcomes do not experience the full consequences of this until years 10 to 12. It was this growing awareness that made boys most anxious and concerned about their future.
- Those who believed they would not do well in exams spoke of having reduced career choices available to them, and were very pessimistic about employment opportunities. Conversely, those who expected to do well spoke of aspirations towards professional careers post college or university.

## **Barriers to learning from boys' point of view included:**

- Falling behind in school and course work and feeling they could not catch up
- The lack of basic literacy and numeracy skills that are being carried forward from primary school and are not attended to early on in post-primary school.
- Getting bored easily and allowing this to show itself in disruptive behaviour in the classroom or simply turning off from the teacher.
- Poor teacher/pupil relationships
- Boys from lower academic class streams perceiving they were not given the same opportunities to learn as those from higher academic classes.

- A lack of connection between subjects and their everyday lives.
- The pressures that start to build around Year 10 and carry on through to Year 12 and their need for dedicated support at these times.
- A lack of belief that success in school would actually lead to a job and fears of debt if they go to university.
- Boys being unprepared for key transitional stages during adolescence.
- Boys feeling alienated within their communities and disconnected from the world of adults.
- Incidents of bullying.
- Violence (or threat of violence) being perceived as part of their everyday lives

#### **Practical Considerations on early identification of barriers to learning.**

- More targeted early year's intervention with boys who are not doing well or not enjoying school is needed in primary school and followed through to post- primary school if required.
- Practical strategies to address boys who are falling behind and therefore unlikely to achieve positive educational outcomes should be put in place at the point of identification. Individual learning packages may be necessary to address the catch up required.
- Boys from lower streams would benefit enormously from additional one to one teacher support and/or, alternative academic support, particularly during preparation for Key Stage Three and GCSE exams.
- A Strategy to working with boys that addresses barriers to learning should be informed by an understanding of what motivates boys and begin during primary school in partnership with parents and local communities.
- Practical support is needed from Year 10 that enables boys to match ambition to future and potential opportunities. This should encourage boys to pursue realistic opportunities and employment avenues linked to their achievements in school.

There is also a need for emotional support in Years 10-12 as the dampening of enthusiasm or lowering of ambition or aspirations may cause boys to feel negative towards themselves.

## **2. *Gender specific approaches***

### **Key Statement**

There is an absence of gender specific approaches, possibly due to a lack of evidence of their effectiveness.

### **Recommendation 2**

**Further research into gender specific teaching should be carried out.**

### **Evidence**

- Strategies of a general nature to address underachievement show limited evidence that these are impacting positively on boys' achievement.
- There is an absence of gender specific approaches and lack of targeted interventions to address male underachievement in schools.
- Strategies aimed at having a positive impact on boys' underachievement may start too late. (One model, 'Boys Ready for Learning Project' in the UK, is showing evidence of the value of early interventions (from P1). It combines work with disengaged boys, parents and teachers).
- The significant parent in these boys' life was usually their mother
- This connection or closeness to the mother sometimes extended into post-primary school whereby there was an expectation from the boys to be 'mammied' by female teachers in the school.



- It was anticipated that good relationships with fathers would have a positive influence on boys by reducing misbehaviour levels. However, closeness to father did not guarantee lower misbehaviour levels or higher academic focus in this sample.
- Frequent family mealtimes were connected with lower misbehaviour levels and greater academic focus, suggesting that a stable and strong family dynamic may be a better indicator to improve academic achievement than a focus on one particular parent.
- This study was inconclusive in regard to the significance of supportive adults / parents and their contribution to how well a boy will do in school.
- More male teachers in schools offers the potential of providing boys with positive role models while male youth workers can provide this role within local community based projects.
- 'Dads and Lads' programmes offer an extracurricular opportunity for schools to develop and extend support for boys between school and home.

### **Practical considerations for gender specific approaches**

- A gender specific focus should be an integral aspect of initial teacher training.
- Pedagogy and styles of learning should have a gender specific focus which attempts to better understand the wide range of issues and complexities associated with young male development.
- This should include recognition of the broad range of boys' abilities in the classroom and their different needs, and teachers being aware of what motivates boys.
- A strategy to improve boys' achievement should include training for teachers in gender specific approaches; raising boys' aspirations and increasing boys' understanding of the role of significant adults, the school and its link to the workplace.
- Approaches should help boys see that they are building a skills base as well as a knowledge base.

## **3. *Mental, emotional, physical health and self-esteem***

### **Key statement**

Understanding and appreciating age specific issues associated with mental, emotional, physical, psychological and cognitive development are crucial for understanding adolescent male behaviour.

### **Recommendation 3**

**Teacher training should support teachers to understand, recognise and respond to the changing needs of adolescent boys and young men.**

### **Evidence**

- Levels of physical well-being across the sample were consistently below the UK norm.
- The sample had slightly higher levels of psychological wellbeing compared to the UK. This higher level of psychological functioning was consistent across the 5 years with the exception of Year 10.
- Levels of psychological well-being dropped to the lowest levels for each grouping in Year 10 (year of GCSE selection) and then increased in Year 11 but subsequently dropped in some cases in Year 12. Notably these shifting trends appear to occur when boys are selecting and preparing for GCSE's.
- Boys reporting low levels of self-reported misbehaviour had the highest psychological well-being. Conversely, boys reporting high levels of misbehaviour had the lowest levels of psychological well-being, linking certain types of behaviour with well-being.

- In terms of emotional functioning, the sample, irrespective of school type and year of the study, was generally well adjusted with more boys falling within the normal range and less in the abnormal range compared to the UK norms.
- In contrast, the social functioning related factors (conduct, hyperactivity, peer relations and pro-social behaviour) consisted of a larger percentage of boys in the abnormal range compared to the UK norm.
- The majority of Year 12 boys indicated that they had at least one problem during the school year (74.2%). However teachers were generally not seen as someone they would go to for help.
- A positive and significant finding over the five years revealed that between 87–88% of participants reported 'never', or 'seldom' being bullied. However, a small minority (11.1%) reported being bullied 'quite often', 'very often' or 'always', (with always being 2%). This would suggest that bullying is primarily perpetrated in schools by a proportionately small minority of boys (12%) on a relatively small number of boys (11.1%).
- After a peak in Year 9, there was an overall decrease in boys indicating that they would confide in both their parents when they were in trouble, suggesting that as boys get older they are less likely to talk to an adult about issues causing them concern.
- Across the 5 years of the study there was a noticeable increase in boys reporting they would confide in a friend for support suggesting that as boys get older they appear to rely less on the support of adults and depend more heavily on the support and advice of peers.
- While schools did offer counselling, usually one day per week, very few of the boys in focus groups reported attending these sessions.
- The majority of boys in focus groups appreciated pastoral care in school and found this useful. This role has enormous potential for boys who need particular types of support or have problems in school.

#### **Practical considerations for mental, emotional and physical health and self-esteem**

- Helping boys to understanding and appreciating age specific issues associated with mental, emotional, physical, psychological and cognitive development will enable them to better understand adolescent male behaviour.
- Consideration should be given to the time allocated for boys to engage in physical activity either within school, or after-school activities.
- Boys should be encouraged and provided with opportunities to talk to adults.
- Teachers should be proactive in engaging boys and have an openness to listening to their concerns through various formal and informal support systems.
- Teachers should aim to be more pro-active in finding ways that they can not only be available, but offer more practical help to boys.
- The mechanisms for providing support to boys need to be encouraged from an early stage (i.e. primary school).
- It is important to acknowledge that it takes time to build trust and rapport in order to create a climate whereby boys will discuss their feelings and disclose information.
- Those who offer boys emotional support should have a primary focus on being a good listener, offering encouragement, and helping sort issues as quickly as possible.
- Support systems in schools should be explicit and as far as possible confidential.
- The number of adolescent boys using 'counselling' services within schools should be monitored to identify, firstly, how many boys, in comparison to girls use this service, and secondly, at what age boys mostly use this service during school.
- Schools should build upon boys' positive attitudes to pastoral care.

## **4. *Masculinity and Becoming a man***

### **Key Statement**

The ways in which adolescent males construct their understanding of masculinity and being a man in early to mid-adolescence is complex, negotiated and renegotiated according to age, location and a range of wider social factors. This process has important implications for understanding adolescent male behaviour and attitudes towards education and learning.

### **Recommendation 4**

**Boys should explore, reflect and develop a critical understanding of masculinity, and within this should be encouraged to challenge dominant and stereotypical notions of masculinity that can impact negatively upon themselves and others.**

### **Evidence**

- Literature reveals that schools are instrumental in the formation of masculine identities.
- Masculinity varies not only from culture to culture, but also from community to community, and perhaps even from school to school. This 'localised' understanding of masculinities becomes further complicated as boys progress through adolescence.
- In this study, boys aged 11 and 12 (early adolescence) were more inclined to adhere to stereotypical notions of men and masculinity. However, this reduced significantly with boys aged 13-16 (mid-adolescence) when they were more likely to reject narrow masculine stereotypes and begin forming their own interpretations of morality and masculine identity.
- Boys with the characteristics of low academic focus, who misbehaved more often, had the highest levels of stereotypical perceptions of being a man across the sample.
- There is a connection between stereotypical masculine attitudes and greater levels of misbehaviour, which adversely affects academic focus. However, as these stereotypical beliefs decreased over the five years of the study, this would suggest that as adolescent boys mature there is a lower probability of misbehaviour and greater likelihood of higher levels of academic focus, and ultimately academic achievement.
- Achieving manhood was not clearly defined in the minds of these boys and they received mixed messages from different adults (and peers) about what it means to be a man.
- Boys consistently spoke about the pressures and confusion of moving away from childhood behaviours to becoming, and being accepted as a young man.
- Being seen and treated like a maturing adult was an important part of this graduation for boys in this study.

### **Practical considerations for masculinity and becoming a man:**

- For those working with boys in a school environment there is a need to better understand the internal pressures experienced by adolescent males in constructing their masculine identities and the link between this and their attitudes to school and learning.
- Boys would benefit from having a specific pedagogy during their development to assist their understanding of what it means to be a man and to celebrate masculinity.
- This should include exploration of why certain boys do not seek emotional support. This complex area of male development is integral to working effectively with boys and young men.
- Supporting boys to understand complexities within masculinity and the transition from boy to man should begin in early years education and be reinforced in post-primary school.
- It is important that teachers and other significant adults appreciate the complex ways in which masculinities are constructed and the internal and external pressures that can influence stereotypical male behaviour.

- A dedicated time spent exploring ‘being a man’ will help adolescent boys to better understand masculinity and examine male stereotypes.
- It is more likely that boys who are supported to reflect upon masculinity will be in a much stronger position to contemplate the effects of stereotyping on themselves and others. This type of self-awareness will also enable boys to better understand, for example, the roots of homophobic behaviour and bullying that are so often apparent in young male youth culture.
- While positive role modelling, particularly by male teachers, will help alleviate stereotypical perceptions certain boys have about their education (and themselves), the actual question ‘what is a positive role model?’ needs to be more clearly defined.

## ***5. Support for Transitions during Adolescence***

### **Key Statement**

Boys expressed concerns about a lack of preparedness for key transitional stages during adolescence such as transitions from primary to post-primary school, Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4, school to college/university/work, boy to man.

### **Recommendation 5**

**Each school should offer boys support during key transitional stages such as primary to post-primary school, Key Stage 3, GCSE selection, school to college/university/work, and careers advice.**

### **Evidence**

- Boys appeared to be unprepared for key transitional stages during adolescence.
- While the majority of boys in this study successfully negotiated the transition from primary to post-primary school, the extent of feelings and anxieties that this process creates amongst boys should not be underestimated.
- Year Heads reported that boys took longer to settle than girls when they arrived at post-primary school. Some said this was because they were arriving as ‘failures’ (having failed their 11 plus), some because boys took longer to get used to the change in structure at post-primary school, and others that boys struggle more with the social side of post-primary school life. Whether positively or negatively, all of these were seen as having an impact on boys’ motivation.
- When Year 8 boys arrived in school they reported that the playground, particularly during break times was where most bullying and fighting took place. They proposed that this could be managed better by teachers or senior pupils in the school.
- A preference for break times in the playground being organised around school year groups was expressed by the younger boys in Years 8 and 9. Their wish to be separated from older boys in years 10, 11 and 12 was strong.
- Key Stage Three was perceived as a crucial time in school as for the first time boys begin to think seriously about GCSE selection and their future beyond school.
- Poorly informed decisions at this time have major implications in regard to boys’ aspirations beyond school.
- From Year 10 boys became increasingly aware of the importance of exams (GCSE’s). They reported much more cognisance of the consequences of not doing well at GCSE compared to the 11+ and connected failure at GCSE level as being a key determinant of their future life / career opportunities. Striking differences in attitudes were apparent between those who expected to do well in GCSE’s and those who did not.
- A significant minority of boys in focus groups believed that some subjects were simply a ‘waste of time’ and the only motivational factor was to get a GCSE. These boys believed they

would benefit more from learning other more practical skills that would enhance their employment opportunities.

- The same boys reported frustration at being offered no alternative to GCSE's, even though they expected to fail subjects. These boys felt powerless to change their circumstances and found it difficult to envisage a successful future.
- Those who believed they would not do well spoke of having reduced career choices open to them, and were very pessimistic about employment opportunities. Conversely, those who expected to do well spoke of aspirations towards professional careers post college or university.

#### **Practical considerations for transitions during adolescence:**

- Boys need a specific pedagogy, at times during their development, to understand the importance of transitions.
- The preparation from Primary 7 to post-primary school is a considered process for all children but those presenting with possible difficulties and negative attitudes towards leaving primary school may require individual profiling and dedicated plans to help them make the transition smoother and more effective.
- Supporting boys to be emotionally prepared for the transition from primary to post-primary school is as important as being academically prepared.
- A dedicated teacher in each school should have responsibility for supporting pupils before, during and after the transition from primary to post-primary school.
- During Years 8 and 9 the playground should be closely monitored by staff as this is when and where most boys experience problems and conflict.
- Year 12 boys could be positively involved in managing playground activity. This type of mentoring will build confidence for younger boys and enable older boys to be role models to younger boys.
- Time should be given at the end of each year to map out the following year to ensure there is clarity of purpose, expectations, responsibilities and support. This will be particularly beneficial in orientating Year 9 boys towards Key Stage Three.
- More practical support particularly from Year 10 is needed to enable boys to match ambition to realistic employment opportunities.
- Targeting different ways in which boys can recognise their learning will help them to see that they are building a skills base as well as a knowledge base for the future.

## **6. *Relationships with Teachers***

### **Key Statement**

The nature of teacher/pupil relationship is a primary factor in boys' motivation and attitudes towards learning. While this relationship is important for all young people, it was the primary factor in determining the extent to which these boys engaged with lessons and strongly influenced their expectations as to how well they would do in subjects.

### **Recommendation 6**

**The importance of teacher/pupil relationships should be at the heart of schools' ethos and approach to learning.**

### **Evidence**

- Whilst a positive finding from this longitudinal study was that the majority of boys had positive relationships with teachers, there were a significant minority of boys who did not.

- Throughout this study, boys' perceived relationships with teachers as the primary determining factor in regard to how well they believed they would do in subjects. This relationship also predominantly determined the extent to which they engaged, and disengaged, with the learning process.
- Regardless of school type, boys felt they had more positive relationships with teachers who provided praise, encouragement and showed respect.
- Where they perceived poor teacher/pupil relationships boys quickly withdrew from subjects and the learning process.
- Findings revealed that the more a boy liked a teacher the higher their academic focus/ subject preference and attitude to the potential of achievement.
- Poor relationships with teachers were associated with higher levels of misbehaviour and 'turn off' to subjects.
- Boys in focus groups expressed a desire that teachers should get to know them better and treat them differently, particularly as they got older. A major source of frustration was their perception that teachers continued to treat them as children instead of maturing adults within the school.
- As boys progressed through adolescence their needs changed and therefore they desired, and expected, a different and more mature and mutual relationship with teachers.
- Those boys with a greater sense of duty (i.e. responsibility traits) were more likely to have a stronger relationship with their teacher, which suggests boys appreciate being given increased levels of responsibility as they mature.
- 'Every School a Good School' refers to the need for enthusiastic teachers who are adaptable and flexible with their teaching strategies.

#### **Practical considerations for teacher / pupil relationships**

- Teacher training should consider the potential place and value of interpersonal skills training, in particular for engaging boys and young men.
- A significant majority of boys from focus groups requested to have the same Year Head throughout their time at post-primary school. This will be particularly useful in ensuring greater continuity throughout their school experience and promote and develop increased levels of trust as boys mature.
- Boys in focus groups suggested one to one meetings with their Year Heads would be useful if they were having difficulty in school or needed to talk about their educational needs.
- Boys were looking for teachers who were interested in them, encouraged them, showed them respect and would help them sort out issues as quickly as possible. (see page 58)

## **7. *Youth Work methodologies***

### **Key Statement**

Youth work methodologies were effective in engaging boys in the classroom. The approach was relationship driven and developed as the boys matured across the five years.

### **Recommendation 7**

**Youth work methodologies should be utilised as appropriate. While youth work is aimed at all young people, its methodologies may be particularly useful for engaging young people who are disengaged / disengaging from mainstream education or facing particular barriers to learning.**

## **Evidence**

- Youth Work is distinctively educational and involves constructive interventions with young people in non-formal settings. It is primarily concerned with personal and social education, and is characterised by the voluntary engagement of young people.
- Equality, inclusion and rights are the cornerstones of youth work. Its central purpose is to support and encourage young people to mature and reach their potential as valued individuals and responsible citizens and participate in shaping and influencing their own lives, communities and wider society.
- The approach was relationship driven and developed as the boys matured across the five years.
- Boys continually reported liking and enjoying the sessions run by youth workers. This was supported by positive feedback from teachers in the schools.
- Teachers acknowledged the benefits of youth work methodologies in the classroom such as group work, story-telling, discussion, personal reflection, and connecting with boys' everyday life experiences.
- Youth work interventions demonstrated that by addressing sensitive and controversial subjects, school was perceived as connecting more directly to their learning and everyday lives and experiences.
- Boys engaged actively with the subjects in these sessions and were highly motivated. They responded thoughtfully to complex issues and were encouraged to reflect upon their behaviour.
- Teachers were impressed and surprised by the thoughts and knowledge boys had on subjects not normally discussed in the classroom.
- Youth work interventions enabled boys to connect with subjects such as masculinity, violence, emotional intelligence and feelings.
- The interventions helped boys prepare in practical ways for the future and enabled them to learn and rehearse new skills.
- Boys gained a combination of skills and knowledge from the interventions.
- Feedback from the youth work interventions demonstrated that boys who struggled with academic work often displayed other positive life qualities and skills that were not appreciated in school.
- Youth work methodologies increased teachers' understanding and empathy towards those boys who may be at risk or susceptible to contextual factors outside of school.

## **Practical considerations for non-formal education in schools:**

- Youth work methodologies could be particularly useful in supporting young people who face particular barriers to their education.
- Youth work methodologies were effective in engaging boys and could be better utilised within all levels of education.
- Youth work methodologies work with young people to increase their ability and confidence to ask questions that connect to their own ambitions and aspirations for their school and their community.
- Youth workers can play a valuable role in building bridges between schools and communities.
- Youth work skills are particularly useful when consulting young people and in promoting their voice.
- Youth Workers could play a valuable role, for example, in the development of youth forums or pupil councils that represent young people at school.
- Shared training in certain areas for teachers and youth workers would promote closer working relationships between formal and non-formal education.

## **8. The educational environment**

### **Key statement**

The very formal nature of the classroom left a significant number of boys feeling bored, frustrated and impacted negatively on their concentration, particularly by having to remain sitting still and taking copious notes for large parts of the day.

### **Recommendation 8**

**School buildings and teaching plans should be designed with flexibility, movement and stimulation in mind. Ideally, young people should be involved in the design of the 'shared space' that teachers and pupils share in the day to day running of the school.**

### **Evidence**

- Throughout the 5 years of this study an average of 60% of boys reported fidgeting and 65% reported being easily distracted.
- Boredom and distraction were strongly linked to higher levels of misbehaviour.
- Boys reported having lower energy levels, particularly during the afternoon, which left them feeling tired and lacking concentration.
- When asked how they would like to learn, boys reported enjoying classes where there was interaction, creativity, fun and which aroused their curiosity. Classes that encouraged such interaction tapped into boys' natural energy and increased their attention, concentration, motivation, focus and retention.
- Boys from lower academic class streams perceived they were not given the same opportunities to learn as those from higher academic classes which made them disengage from the learning process, believing others had given up on them.
- It should not be underestimated how important the physical school environment was to these boys' attitudes towards learning. Throughout this study, poor classroom and building environment was identified as de-motivating factors for boys across the sample.
- Large classes were identified as reasons why some boys did not receive the additional academic support they believed they needed. The size and layout of classes also impacted negatively on a significant minority of boys' attitudes towards learning.
- Poor perceptions of the school environment remained consistent across all 5 years of the study, with a direct correlation found between negative perceptions of the environment and levels of misbehaviour.
- School physical environment was strongly associated with levels of misbehaviour and negative attitudes towards learning.
- There was a strong sense that because of large classes a lot of time was spent by teachers on controlling the class and using didactic teaching styles.

### **Practical considerations for The Educational Environment:**

- Boys should be encouraged to play a full and active role in the life and work of the school whether through school councils or as part of a process that further increases their sense of belonging.
- Involving boys in classroom design and layout could assist a more positive attitude to that environment.
- Learning environments need to engage, stimulate and excite adolescent boys. The use of movement, energy and sense of adventure significantly increases boys' motivation and attitudes towards learning.



- Kinaesthetic approaches such as icebreakers that encourage physical contact and movement should be employed in classrooms to combat low energy levels that affect boys' concentration.
- Teaching methods such as small group work, discussion based work, ice breakers, learning outside of the classroom through museum visits and river walks were all identified as motivating factors that engaged boys more fully in the learning process.
- Opportunities for adolescent boys to pre-contemplate certain situations and scenarios through practical lessons such as role playing (rehearsing) are particularly useful in regard to preparing boys and young men for new situations and reducing anxiety.
- There is enormous potential to link boys' keen interest in computers and computer games to the learning process.
- More consideration should be given to the potential benefits of youth work methodologies for engaging, stimulating and motivating young people.

## **9. *Links between education and 'real' life***

### **Key Statement**

Boys in this study felt that most subjects did not connect directly to the reality of their everyday lives outside of school.

### **Recommendation 9**

**Schools should develop stronger links with parents and local communities and should try to link lessons to real life experiences as much as possible.**

### **Evidence**

- Boys reported feeling increasingly alienated from adults and their communities as they got older.
- Boys longed for a greater sense of belonging within their community yet were unaware of any processes to support this.
- Boys perceived that as they got older adults treated them/would treat them with higher levels of suspicion and distrust. This was consistent regardless of which school type or community boys belonged to.
- Connecting with community and partnership with pupils are key factors in the success of schools.
- Boys consistently reported that many school subjects were totally unconnected to the reality of their everyday lives. They strongly reported that they do better academically when they enjoy subjects that are relevant to their lives, their issues, their futures and potential careers.
- When there were clear connections between subjects and the 'real world' boys engaged better with the subject and the teacher.
- In this study boys engaged actively and enthusiastically when discussing subjects with youth workers such as violence, aggression, emotions, masculinity, becoming a man and exploration of male risk-taking behaviour.
- While boys spoke of feeling part of their school, they saw school as separate from the wider community.
- School was perceived as a safe environment to discuss controversial issues.

**Practical Considerations for developing stronger links with parents and local communities and linking lessons to real life experiences.**

- Schools need to link more with communities and youth services provided in those communities. Awareness of what is happening for boys and young men within and around particular communities is central to this.
- Schools (both primary and post-primary) should consider becoming even more active in after-school and evening activities that build on the perceived safety that boys get from school. This would necessitate much closer partnerships between schools, communities, parents and youth services.
- Teachers should shape their teaching plans in response to the age and realities of adolescent boys' lives.
- Teachers could begin each Monday morning by discussing with boys 'what they did at the weekend.' This type of 'check in' would help boys make more concrete links between their life inside and out of school.

## **10. *Positive Behaviour Policy***

### **Key Statement**

Disciplinary procedures were considered to be focussed on punishing behaviour only and not on supportive resolution.

### **Recommendation 10**

**Positive behaviour policy procedures should be clear, immediate and set within a restorative context that is nurturing and relational.**

### **Evidence**

- Interviews with Year Heads revealed that boys were taking longer to settle into post-primary schools than girls and certain problems with boys' behaviour could be identified from early in Year 8.
- Over 70% of boys self-reported misbehaviour in Years 8 and 9.
- The top three answers given across the years about how they felt about misbehaving and getting into trouble was:
  - 'I didn't care'
  - 'I wanted to get it sorted.'
  - 'Angry with myself'
- While levels of misbehaviour fell significantly across the years, 42% of boys self-reported misbehaving in Year 12.
- Boys reduced levels of misbehaviour in Years 10-12 occurred while they were focused on GCSE exams and preparation.
- When boys got into trouble they were more likely to confide in a friend than a parent or teacher, particularly as they got older.
- In focus groups certain boys reported being more prone to 'messaging around' when they were bored.
- There was frustration from boys in focus groups because they believed disciplinary procedures were applied inconsistently, excessively, counterproductively and strongly linked to notions of power for the teacher and powerlessness for pupils.
- Boys were looking for was a disciplinary system that was clear yet enabled them to feel emotionally secure.

- While boys in this study experienced violence both as victims and perpetrators in school, it would appear that it was a relatively small minority of boys (around 10%) who perpetrated acts of violence.

#### **Practical considerations promoting positive behaviour policy**

- It is important that a school culture is based upon accountability and not blame, and is one that nurtures a sense of connection and encourages and fosters responsibility for self and for others. This will enable boys to deal with the consequences of their actions in a restorative way, ideally with their Year Head, a parent and if appropriate a victim, when they get into trouble in school.
- Boys expressed a desire for problems they caused in school to be sorted out immediately.
- Teachers should reflect upon the nature of their relationship with boys who are prone to get into trouble and those who are not. This will enable teachers to differentiate between managing behaviour and managing relationships.
- Teachers should focus more directly on the importance of providing opportunities for boys to reflect upon the links between their feelings and behaviour.
- Making stronger links with the home, community, and other professionals, will enable schools to develop a more consistent and professional approach to positive behaviour policy.

## **11. *Impact of experiences of violence***

### **Key statement**

The majority of boys reported that they feel school is a safe place, and that bullying is a relatively minor issue, perpetrated by a small number of boys on a small number of boys. However for those involved in bullying, it had a profound impact on their lives and learning.

Addressing violence and the nature of violence may help reduce acts of perceived violence in schools as boys become more aware of the effects of violence on themselves and others.

### **Recommendation 11**

**Building on the fact that school is perceived as a relatively safe place, schools should provide opportunities for boys to discuss issues in relation to violence, effects of violence and coping strategies.**

### **Evidence:**

- The majority of boys reported that school is a relatively safe place.
- Bullying was perceived as being perpetrated by a small number of boys on a small number of boys.
- Quantitative data showed a falling off in reported incidents of bullying as boys progressed through school. In focus groups boys spoke of their need to feel safe and be free from bullying in school. This was very important to boys.
- The general consensus in focus groups was that while the majority of boys do not experience bullying in school, most incidences of bullying occurred during the first two years and was perpetrated by boys their own age.
- The term 'violence' was viewed as a much wider concept than 'bullying'.
- Although violence does happen in school it was usually perceived as 'pushing or shoving'
- Boundaries between what these boys perceived as healthy male banter and acts of violence were unclear.

- Boys were ambiguous about differences between acts of violence and 'messaging around' and appeared to accept that this is what happens when you go to "big" school.
- Boys expected there to be times when they would get 'picked on' and vice versa times when they may be perpetrators of 'messaging around' that could be perceived as acts of violence.
- There was a close association between those who admitted to perpetrating acts of violence with boys reporting misbehaviour in school. The same boys reported not liking education, learning and teachers.
- The majority of those who experienced being a victim of a violent act did not talk to anyone about the incident. This suggests a 'bottling up' or a need to feel they can cope or not show weakness through self-disclosure.
- There was a clear link between levels of misbehaviour, hyperactivity and lower academic focus.
- A high number of boys in the study experienced being a victim of violence either within or without the school (e.g. 80.9% of the sample experienced being a victim of a violent incident in Year 10).
- As these boys progressed through school there was growing awareness and more considered thought given to violence and its place in their lives.
- Violence was a part of their everyday life and navigating their way around it, taking part in it or finding ways to avoid it was not an unusual experience or expectation for these boys.
- There was a notable reduction of boys getting into trouble as they progressed through school (74.9% in Year 8 down to 42.6% in Year 12). However, boys' reporting being the victim of a violent act was high (over 70% across all years and over 80% in Year 8 and 9).
- Boys perceived that violence was on the increase and alcohol, particularly at weekends, and drugs were contributing factors to violence.
- Those who were perpetrators spoke of being attracted by the 'buzz' of violence and perceiving this as 'exciting and fun.' These young men reported a mixture of excitement and fear, at times looking for trouble and being attracted to riots, particularly in interface areas.
- Consistently across the five years of the study, the highest reported feelings by the boys for being in trouble was 'they did not care', 'wanted to get it sorted,' and 'felt stupid,' while the least reported feelings were 'feeling good' and 'scared.' The noticeable proportion of boys who did not care about being in trouble may imply that these boys may potentially commit more violent acts during school.
- While the nature of violence and violent acts are complex and should not be over simplified, findings from this study suggest that boys in an all male environment appear to experience higher levels of violence than boys in a mixed gender environment.
- In focus groups boys talked in a derogatory way about those from other traditions and divisions were still as strong between Catholics and Protestants. Both groups of young men reported that they heard many stories from their family and friends that made them wary and distrusting of people from a different religion.
- Boys spoke of a fear of people they did not know.
- Showing they could 'cope' with conflict and violence was mentioned by a minority of boys as being part of the way in which they demonstrated to others they were becoming men.
- The nature of violence in Northern Ireland has become more complex for boys and young men. New and old threats appear to leave many adolescent males feeling anxious and uncertain about the type of future they can expect. Boys, particularly those living in interface areas, reported ongoing incidences of sectarianism and feeling alienated from the peace process.
- Regardless of school type, most boys reported knowing members of paramilitary organisations and spoke of ongoing conflict and confusion about the role of the police.
- Boys across the study reported increased levels of racial prejudice in school and their communities.

- Boys displayed a lack of awareness in their role towards creating a new society.
- In focus groups and youth work interventions boys reported they rarely got opportunities to discuss issues such as violence, despite this being identified by them as something that was part of their daily lives.
- Boys engaged enthusiastically with the theme of violence and believed this gave them knowledge and skills that was useful to them in their everyday lives.

**Practical Considerations for addressing violence and violence related behaviour:**

- Addressing violence and the consequences of violence in school may help reduce violent acts both in school and communities as boys become more aware of the effects of violence on themselves and others.
- This should include developing initiatives that raise awareness of violence associated with bullying, sectarianism, race, homophobia, the legacy of the troubles and the growing immigrant population in Northern Ireland.
- It was evident there is a need for young men to become more actively involved in peace-building processes and practical initiatives that better equip them to understand and appreciate issues such as equity, diversity and interdependence.
- Peace building could be a theme within school curriculum and built into citizenship curriculum.
- Specific initiatives addressing bullying will increase self-awareness amongst boys who perpetrate violence. This should include making perpetrators more aware of the effects and consequences of bullying through restorative approaches.
- Restorative responses to addressing youth violence effectively will necessitate a multi-agency approach including schools, parents, youth justice, youth service, community safety initiatives and local community groups.
- Schools should monitor and keep a record of where perceived acts of violence occur within school. This will help identify 'triggers' of violence and 'areas' where more staff supervision (or Year 11 or 12 mentors) is required.
- Facilitated and organised opportunities for adolescent males to meet and discuss violent related issues with those who respond to violence (i.e. police, fire brigade, army, 'bouncers') and those who were previously involved in violence (ex-paramilitary, ex-prisoners) should be part of the content of violence-related programmes.
- Boys spoke about dangerous places as much as dangerous people. This suggests there is a need to explore how geographical areas can be made safer for adolescent boys and others.
- Services targeted at adolescent males could be built into the school day, and even into the evening to ensure that boys and young men have alternatives to the street with its dangers.
- Opportunities to present scenarios of violent-related daily issues were extremely useful in supporting these boys to reflect upon various forms of moral issues associated with violence.
- Initiatives targeting recently arrived young males from outside Northern Ireland to ensure they have the skills, language and understanding to live in Northern Ireland as this may help ease increasing racial prejudice and conflict.
- Schools should work more closely with Translink and Metro to address personal safety issues for those boys who travel through interface areas on the way to and from school.
- Opportunities should be created for adolescent males to participate in community safety initiatives. This could be carried out in partnerships between schools, families and other bodies involved in community safety.

## SECTION 10: CONCLUSION

This five year longitudinal study tracked 378 boys from nine post-primary schools across Northern Ireland investigating their educational experiences and factors that impacted upon their social, physical, psychological and emotional well-being. The study used a mixed and creative methodology that aimed to give a voice to boys whose views are often absent from research and academic studies.

As evidenced in this report, factors that impact upon boys' educational underachievement are complex and must be considered within a wider context of socio-economic issues such as poverty, class, ethnicity, social disadvantage, a declining industrial base and less demand for traditional male jobs. With the decline of traditional industry in Northern Ireland and the shift in favour of new knowledge economies, the value of education is arguably greater than it ever has been.

While for several decades boy's underachievement has regularly been raised as a problem it was extremely difficult for the research team to find specific strategies addressing boys' underachievement. Although teachers who were interviewed as part of this study recognised the predominance of boys with lower academic achievement, they generally did not take this into account in terms of learning styles or teaching approaches. There were also few examples of studies in Northern Ireland that focus specifically on how children learn about gender. Type of school (grammar and secondary), religion and poverty have drawn the focus of attention and may be seen as being more significant in understanding boys' underachievement. The downside to this approach may be a lack of focus on targeting and engaging particular groups such as underachieving boys.

While there are perhaps no simple solutions to reduce the achievement gap between boys and girls, finding practical and realistic ways to support those who have fallen behind in school is undoubtedly a fundamental component in addressing educational underachievement. While identifying underachievement is based on a teacher's professional judgement at every phase of education, strategies for addressing underachievement must begin during early years' education and be supported by primary and post-primary schools in partnership with parents and communities. This is essential if boys and young men are to be supported to achieve their potential and find their place in an increasingly competitive global economy.

The 2009 DE policy document 'Every School a Good School' sets out a solution for raising standards and narrowing the performance gap. However, while standards for boys and girls have risen over recent years, and despite a suite of recent DE policy and papers addressing Literacy and Numeracy (see DENI, 2009, 2010, 2011) highlighting boys as a specific target, it is evident that a core number of boys continue to under-perform academically and therefore need, and desire, more effective ways of engaging them in education and learning.

The social context of these boys' lives had a strong bearing upon their thoughts, beliefs and attitudes towards education and learning. However because this social context was seldom addressed in the classroom, boys perceived school as being disconnected from the reality of their everyday lives and experiences.

Despite a changing political context of peacebuilding in Northern Ireland, boys voiced ongoing concerns about their personal safety and reported various forms of violence simply '*as the way it is.*' Boys spoke of ongoing incidences of sectarianism and being fearful of paramilitaries. They reported increased levels of racial conflict. Boys also spoke of feeling alienated from their communities and distant from the world of adults and decision making processes. This alienation was underpinned by a perception from boys that adults increasingly viewed them with suspicion and distrust, particularly as they got older - a perception that was also apparent in attitudes towards the police and young

men from different communities. While it is important that adolescent boys are accepted and promoted as part of communities and family life, at present there appears to be little in place to facilitate this process.

It is widely acknowledged that much of what young people learn occurs outside of formal education. In this study interventions by experienced youth workers demonstrated the value and benefits of youth work methodologies in addressing everyday issues that impacted directly upon these adolescent boys' lives. Whilst these results are promising, we acknowledge that this was a small-scale study. There is perhaps more research required to highlight the specific role that youth work can play to complement the formal education sector in order that its principles and methodologies can be better understood by policy and decision makers.

While some of the findings in this study may also apply to girls, the focus is firmly on boys. The report has captured boys' thoughts, beliefs and aspirations about their school and life experiences as well as their sense of fun and energy. However the report also records their frustrations, anxieties and at times despair. This was particularly evident for Year 10 boys who perceived they had already fallen behind with their education and felt unable to catch up. Whether they perceived this was due to their lack of interest in education, or because they were not able to cope with the demands of education, the consequences of not achieving 5 or more A\*- C GCSE's or their equivalent had become very apparent for these boys. It was this awareness that made them feel increasingly anxious about transitions beyond school and reflect more deeply about how prepared they were for the future.

The report has made recommendations aimed at schools, principals, policy makers and practitioners which have important pedagogical implications for teaching, engaging and working with boys. Equally important it also offers many pragmatic and cost neutral ways to support teachers in the classroom to help boys make better connections between school and their wider social, emotional and developmental needs. This is not to suggest that this will be easy. Rather it may mean all those who are concerned about boys being more committed to *'Taking Boys Seriously'* and becoming more conscious of the need to find creative and gender specific ways to engage, support and excite boys throughout their education and development.

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## SECTION 13: APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: About you questionnaire
- Appendix 2: Quality of life questionnaire
- Appendix 3: Strengths and difficulties questionnaire
- Appendix 4: About school questionnaire
- Appendix 5: Being a man questionnaire
- Appendix 6: Violence questionnaire
- Appendix 7: Practical considerations

### ***Appendix 1: AboutMe questionnaire***

- 1) What is your date of birth? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) What is the number or name of the house where you live? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) What is your postcode? BT \_ \_ \_ \_

- 4) How would you describe yourself?

*Please tick one*

White ☐ Black ☐ Asian ☐

Chinese ☐ other \_\_\_\_\_

Religion: **Please tick one**

Protestant ☐ Catholic ☐ Muslim ☐ Hindu ☐

Jew ☐ Buddhist ☐ Sikh ☐ other \_\_\_\_\_

- 5) Who brings you up? For example, mum and dad, grandparent, sister or other person or people?

*please say:* \_\_\_\_\_

- 6) Who are you closest to e.g. Mum, Dad, other person?

*please say:* \_\_\_\_\_

- 7)
  - a) What is your father's job? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) What is your mother's job? \_\_\_\_\_

- 8) In an average week, how many times do all of the people in your family who you live with, eat *dinner* together?

*(Please circle one number)*

0      1      2      3      4      5      6      7

## Appendix 2: Quality of life questionnaire

How are you? How do you feel? This is what we would like you to tell us. Please tick the box that fits your answer best.

**Do you have a long-term disability, illness or medical condition?**

☐ No

☐ Yes

Which one? \_\_\_\_\_

### 1. Physical Activities and Health

**In general, how would you say your health is?**

1.

☐ excellent

☐ very good

☐ good

☐ fair

☐ poor

**Thinking about the last week...**

2. Have you felt fit and well?

not at all

slightly

moderately

very

extremely

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

3. Have you been physically active (e. g. running, climbing, biking)?

not at all

slightly

moderately

very

extremely

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

4. Have you been able to run well?

not at all

slightly

moderately

very

extremely

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

**Thinking about the last week...**

5. Have you felt full of energy?

never

seldom

quite often

very often

always

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

### 2. General Mood and Feelings about Yourself



### Thinking about the last week...

- |    |                               |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|----|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. | Has your life been enjoyable? | not at all            | slightly              | moderately            | very                  | extremely             |
|    |                               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

### Thinking about the last week...

- |    |                               |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|----|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 2. | Have you been in a good mood? | never                 | seldom                | quite often           | very often            | always                |
|    |                               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. | Have you had fun?             | never                 | seldom                | quite often           | very often            | always                |
|    |                               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

### Thinking about the last week...

- |    |   |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|----|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 4. | Have you felt sad?  | never                 | seldom                | quite often           | very often            | always                |
|    |   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. | Have you felt so bad that you didn't want to do anything? | never                 | seldom                | quite often           | very often            | always                |
|    |   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. | Have you felt lonely?                                     | never                 | seldom                | quite often           | very often            | always                |
|    |   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. | Have you been happy with the way you are?                 | never                 | seldom                | quite often           | very often            | always                |
|    |   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

## 3. Family and Free Time

### Thinking about the last week...

- |    |   |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|----|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. | Have you had enough time for yourself?  | never                 | seldom                | quite often           | very often            | always                |
|    |   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. | Have you been able to do the things that you want to do in your free time?      | never                 | seldom                | quite often           | very often            | always                |
|    |   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. | Have your parent(s) or guardian(s) had enough time for you?                     | never                 | seldom                | quite often           | very often            | always                |
|    |   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. | Have your parent(s) or guardian(s) treated you fairly?                          | never                 | seldom                | quite often           | very often            | always                |
|    |   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. | Have you been able to talk to your parent(s) or guardian(s) when you wanted to? | never                 | seldom                | quite often           | very often            | always                |
|    |   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. | Have you had enough money to do the same things as your friends?                | never                 | seldom                | quite often           | very often            | always                |
|    |   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. | Have you had enough money for your expenses?                                    | never                 | seldom                | quite often           | very often            | always                |
|    |   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

## 4. Friends

**Thinking about the last week...**

- |    |  |                                |                                 |                                      |                                     |                                 |
|----|--|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. | Have you spent time with your friends?       | never<br><input type="radio"/> | seldom<br><input type="radio"/> | quite often<br><input type="radio"/> | very often<br><input type="radio"/> | always<br><input type="radio"/> |
| 2. | Have you had fun with your friends?          | never<br><input type="radio"/> | seldom<br><input type="radio"/> | quite often<br><input type="radio"/> | very often<br><input type="radio"/> | Always<br><input type="radio"/> |
| 3. | Have you and your friends helped each other? | never<br><input type="radio"/> | seldom<br><input type="radio"/> | quite often<br><input type="radio"/> | very often<br><input type="radio"/> | always<br><input type="radio"/> |
| 4. | Have you been able to rely on your friends?  | never<br><input type="radio"/> | seldom<br><input type="radio"/> | quite often<br><input type="radio"/> | very often<br><input type="radio"/> | always<br><input type="radio"/> |

5. School and Learning

**Thinking about the last week...**

- |    |                                 |                                     |                                   |                                     |                               |                                    |
|----|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. | Have you been happy at school?  | not at all<br><input type="radio"/> | slightly<br><input type="radio"/> | moderately<br><input type="radio"/> | very<br><input type="radio"/> | extremely<br><input type="radio"/> |
| 2. | Have you got on well at school? | not at all<br><input type="radio"/> | slightly<br><input type="radio"/> | moderately<br><input type="radio"/> | very<br><input type="radio"/> | extremely<br><input type="radio"/> |

**Thinking about the last week...**

- |    |   |                                |                                 |                                      |                                     |                                 |
|----|---|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 3. | Have you been able to pay attention?        | never<br><input type="radio"/> | seldom<br><input type="radio"/> | quite often<br><input type="radio"/> | very often<br><input type="radio"/> | always<br><input type="radio"/> |
| 4. | Have you got along well with your teachers? | never<br><input type="radio"/> | seldom<br><input type="radio"/> | quite often<br><input type="radio"/> | very often<br><input type="radio"/> | always<br><input type="radio"/> |

6. Bullying

**Thinking about the last week...**

- |    |  |                                |                                 |                                      |                                     |                                 |
|----|--|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. | Have you been afraid of other girls or boys? | never<br><input type="radio"/> | seldom<br><input type="radio"/> | quite often<br><input type="radio"/> | very often<br><input type="radio"/> | always<br><input type="radio"/> |
| 2. | Have other girls or boys made fun of you?    | never<br><input type="radio"/> | seldom<br><input type="radio"/> | quite often<br><input type="radio"/> | very often<br><input type="radio"/> | always<br><input type="radio"/> |
| 3. | Have other girls or boys bullied you?        | never<br><input type="radio"/> | seldom<br><input type="radio"/> | quite often<br><input type="radio"/> | very often<br><input type="radio"/> | always<br><input type="radio"/> |

### Appendix 3: Strengths and difficulties questionnaire

For each item, please mark the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True. Please give your answers on the basis of how things have been for you **over the last six months**.

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
I try to be nice to other people. I care about their feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am restless, I cannot stay still for long	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I get a lot of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I usually share with others (food, games, pens etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I get very angry and often lose my temper	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am usually on my own. I generally play alone or keep to myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I usually do as I am told	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I worry a lot	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<hr/>			
I am helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am constantly fidgeting or squirming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have one good friend or more	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I fight a lot. I can make other people do what I want	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other people my age generally like me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am easily distracted, I find it difficult to concentrate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am nervous in new situations. I easily lose confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<hr/>			
I am kind to younger children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am often accused of lying or cheating	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other children or young people pick on me or bully me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I often volunteer to help others (parents, teachers, children)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think before I do things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I take things that are not mine from home, school or elsewhere	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I get on better with adults than with people my own age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have many fears, I am easily scared	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I finish the work I'm doing. My attention is good	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Thank you for completing this questionnaire      Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire  
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## Appendix 4: About school questionnaire

**We would like to know your views and experience about school experiences, preferences and post school aspirations**

**1) Thinking about school, how much do you disagree or agree with the following? (Please tick one box per question)**

<i>I like...</i>	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know	I don't do this
I like Art	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like Languages	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like Maths	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like Science	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like PE/sports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like my teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like Drama	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like the school building	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like geography	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like citizenship class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like after school activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like meeting up with my friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like Religion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like Media studies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like History	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like break and lunch times	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like Technology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like Music class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like Computing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**2) What will you do immediately after fifth year (year12)?**

*(Please tick as many as you want)*

Do AS / A levels	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do a course at a further education college	<input type="checkbox"/>
Go to university	<input type="checkbox"/>
Look for a job	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get a trade e.g. plumber, joiner etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sign on the dole	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please say) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

**3) In the future, what job would you most like to have? List your top three choices beginning with the one you would most like to have.**

a) \_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_

c) \_\_\_\_\_

**4) How do you feel about being at this school now?**

*(Please tick as many as you want)*

Worried	Afraid	Angry	Sad	OK	Happy	Excited	Didn't feel anything
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5) Have you ever been in trouble at this school?

☐ YES - now please answer below OR ☐ NO – now skip to Q. 6

How did being in trouble make you feel?

(Please tick the ones you agree with)

I didn't care	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt sad	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt angry with myself	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt there was no-one to talk to	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt stupid	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt sorry	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt scared	<input type="checkbox"/>
I just wanted to get it sorted	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt ashamed	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt angry with someone else	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt good	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know how I felt	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't remember	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please say	<input type="checkbox"/>

6) Who do you talk to when you have a problem?

Please don't write down the person's name. Say what the person is, for example *is my father, is a teacher, is my best mate, is a youth worker* etc.

This person is:

\_\_\_\_\_

OR

☐ I don't talk to anyone

Why do you talk to this person?  
(tick as many as you need)

Because this person will listen to me ☐

Because this person will help me sort out my problems ☐

Because this person won't tell anyone ☐

7) Who do you most look up to or respect? Say what the person does, rather than giving a name. Start by writing down the person you most look up to?

(Please print)

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix five.**

### ***Being a man questionnaire***

#### **We would like to know your views and experience about being a man.**

8) Which of the following things do you disagree or agree describes what a man is? (please tick one box only per question)

<b><i>A man...</i></b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
Is caring	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is responsible	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stands up for himself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stands up for his family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a girlfriend or wife	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is a good father	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accepts people who are different from him	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is good at sports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is tough	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is rich	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is smart/intelligent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Keeps his feelings to himself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is a good fighter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a boyfriend	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Earns money to keep his family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is someone who shouts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is not afraid to cry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will walk away from a fight	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will hug another man	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is aggressive	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Thank you for completing this questionnaire**

## Appendix 6: Violence questionnaire

### 1) How violent do you think the following acts are?

(Please tick one box per question)

	Not at all violent	A bit violent	Not Sure	Violent	Extremely violent	Don't know
Punching someone is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Calling someone rude names is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hitting someone is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Smacking a child is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deliberately ignoring someone is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bullying someone is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being mentioned on the internet in a bad way is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hitting someone with a weapon is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spreading rumours about someone is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stabbing someone is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shouting at someone is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kicking someone is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pushing/shoving someone is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spitting at someone is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sending bullying text messages to a mobile phone is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Threatening someone is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Damaging someone's belongings is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 2) Since starting school last September, has anyone been violent to you?

(Please tick all that apply)

I was punched	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was called rude names	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was hit	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was smacked by an adult	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was deliberately ignored by others	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was bullied	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was mentioned on the internet in a bad way	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was hit with a weapon	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rumours were spread about me	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was stabbed	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was shouted at	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was kicked	<input type="checkbox"/>

- I was pushed/shoved hard ☐
- I was spat at ☐
- Bullying text messages were sent to my mobile phone ☐
- I was threatened ☐
- My belongings were damaged ☐
- Other (please say) ☐
- 
- None of these happened to me ☐

If you ticked any of the above, please complete parts a) to d) on the next page.

If you ticked 'None of these happened to me' then please go to question 3.

**a) Where did this incident or incidents happen?**

(Please tick all that apply)

- In school ☐
- Somewhere else ☐

**b) How seriously were you hurt?**

(Please tick one only)

- | Not hurt at all          | Hurt a bit               | Not sure                 | Hurt                     | Very badly hurt          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**c) Has the incident affected you in the last seven days?**

In the last seven days...

- |  | Not at all               | Rarely                   | Sometimes                | Often                    |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| I could still see pictures of it in my mind, even when I didn't mean to think about it | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I had strong feelings about it   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I remember it when sleeping or trying to sleep   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**d) Did you talk to anyone about what happened?**

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

**3) a. Since September, have you bullied other boys or girls? Please circle the number of times.**

0 times    1    2    3    4    5    6 or more times

**b. Since September, have you sent a text message to someone where you wanted to upset them. If yes, how many times?**

0 times    1    2    3    4    5    6 or more times

**c. Since September, have you started any fights? If yes, how many times?**

0 times    1    2    3    4    5    6 or more times

**4) A. Since September, have you been in trouble at this school?**

☐ YES - now please answer below OR ☐ NO - you have finished!

**How did being in trouble make you feel?**

(Please tick the ones you agree with)

I didn't care ☐



- |                                    |                          |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| I felt sad                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I felt angry with myself           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I felt there was no-one to talk to | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I felt stupid                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I felt sorry                       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I felt scared                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I just wanted to get it sorted     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I felt ashamed                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I felt angry with someone else     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I felt good                        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Don't know how I felt              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I don't remember                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please say)                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- 

**6) B. Who were you in trouble with?**

- |                      |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| A school teacher     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| A parent or guardian | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The police           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please say)   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- 

**Thank you for completing this questionnaire**

## ***Appendix 7: Practical considerations for grouping boys:***

We would propose a classroom could be divided into six distinct groupings

### ***Highest achievers***

Able and behaved  
Able with attitude  
Able but distracted

### ***Lowest achievers***

Less able and behaved  
Less able and distracted  
Less able with attitude

These descriptors can be developed.

- (d) **Able and behaved** (boys who are academically focussed and generally well behaved).
- (e) **Able with attitude** (boys who are academically able, but too often get into conflict with teachers or other boys and end up off point – they are often poor communicators).
- (f) **Able but distracted** (boys who are academically able, but have their priorities elsewhere, such as being social, sport, carers at home or are generally focussed anywhere other than at school).
- (g) **Less able and behaved** (boys who struggle because of poor basic skills or a learning difficulty, but have a willingness and motivation to learn).
- (h) **Less able and distracted** (boys who struggle because of poor basic skills, but they also have priorities elsewhere, and are generally focussed anywhere other than school).
- (i) **Less able with attitude** (boys who struggle with their work, who become disengaged in class and are quite able at disrupting others and getting involved in conflict with teachers and peers and are usually poor communicators).

Most boys fall within these categories, and need to be motivated and dealt with differently and moved up through and within the different categories. Each of these groups will require different approaches and strategies and will impact on the school community in different ways. For example, targeted support on sub-groups 2 and 3 would have a significant impact on school achievement rates, as many of those not quite achieving five grades A\*-Cs are likely to fall within these groups. Groups 4 and 5 may require a significant input in terms of their work, while group 5 may require a significant input on their behaviour as well as work related support, to enable them to move out of these groups.

Groupings identified by Trefor Lloyd.



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